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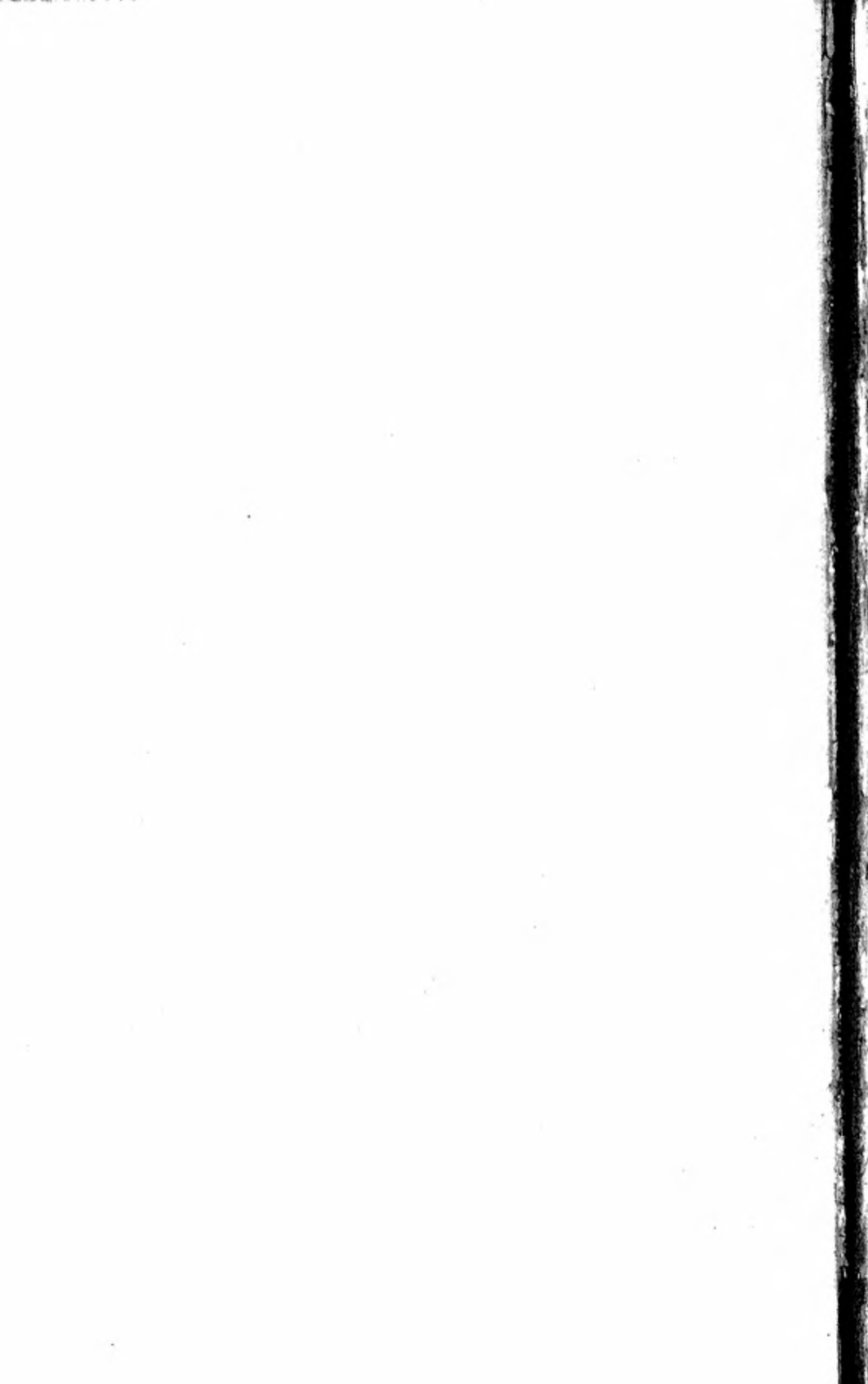
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# THEORIES OF HISTORY

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*Edited with Introductions*

*and Commentary by*

**PATRICK GARDINER**

*Oxford University*



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## FOREWORD

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In making selections for the first part of this book I have been concerned in general to reproduce passages by writers more naturally classified as philosophers of history than as historians. It has also been my aim to represent the authors chosen by reasonably large extracts from their works. This has meant a considerable restriction on the number of writers for whom I have been able to find a place, and I have had to exclude various important and influential figures: Montesquieu, Turgot, Voltaire, Saint-Simon (to name only a few), are not represented here. Considerations of space and continuity have imposed similar limits on the selection of works by contemporary writers presented in the second part of the volume.

In the case of books from which passages have been selected my thanks are due to the publishers concerned, who have kindly given me permission to use their copyright. In the case of articles I wish to express my gratitude to the authors, and to the editors of the journals in which they originally appeared, for consenting to their republication. I wish to thank Mr. W. H. Walsh, Dr. William Dray, and Professor Michael Scriven for allowing me to include articles by them which have not previously been published; Mr. J. J. Kuehl for undertaking the translation of the essay by Dilthey and for greatly assisting me with the introductory comments which precede it; and the editor of the series, Professor Paul Edwards, from whom I have received most valuable suggestions and advice at every stage in the preparation of this anthology. I am also indebted to Messrs. James Bayley, Richard Gale, Leon deLeeuw, Thomas Katen, Pierre Chambellan, Marcel Stchedroff, Bruce Goldberg, Lewis Lederer, Irwin Natov and Mrs. Carol Cade for assisting in the preparation of the bibliography and the index.

P. L. G.



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PART I

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PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY:  
VICO TO COLLINGWOOD



THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY in Europe was pre-eminently a century of advance in the physical sciences, and the major intellectual controversies of the time inevitably centered round the points at which discoveries in these sciences impinged upon the traditional framework of thought and belief inherited from the Middle Ages. As a consequence of this, contributions to every branch of philosophical speculation and inquiry during the period betrayed an acute sensitivity to developments in mathematics and physics. This was true not only of metaphysical theories which aimed to delineate the innermost character of the world but also of philosophical attempts to describe the nature of human knowledge and experience or to lay bare the presuppositions of moral and political judgments.

The way in which current scientific ideas acted upon the minds of philosophers varied, of course, according to individual outlooks, interests, and temperaments. Thus the inspiration of their works might be the desire to solve problems that arose from apparent discrepancies between new knowledge and previously accepted beliefs. Or it might be the wish to assimilate philosophical method to the type of rigorous deductive reasoning that had proved so successful in the formulation of scientific hypotheses and theories. Or, again, it might be the notion of extending to fresh domains procedures and categories that had been fruitfully applied in the investigation of certain types of phenomena. But, although the differences between, say, Hobbes and Descartes, or between Spinoza and Locke, are immense, the soil that nourished their philosophies was the same.

One of the effects of this scientifically orientated mode of thinking was to focus attention upon questions concerning the status and structure of the human mind. Sometimes, for example, it was accredited with certain fixed qualities or powers which were listed and discussed as the properties of a physical object or substance might be listed and discussed. Again, the mind might be pictured according to a spatial or mechanical model; it contained "ideas," or it "operated" upon them. Some general pattern of interpretation was also sought when philosophers moved from the consideration of thought and perception to that of action and intention. Thus certain basic motives were identified which were believed to activate human behavior in a manner that would render such behavior predictable once the laws of their working and combination had been discovered. What was common to these accounts was the view that the human mind, or human nature, possessed a fundamental structure, and that the elements of this structure could be brought to light, whether by careful observation and introspective or intuitive awareness, or by deduction from some more comprehensive theory of the world or the universe. It also tended to be assumed that this structure could not vary in any profound sense but remained constant amongst human beings irrespective of the time and place in which they lived.

A connected approach was adopted when the matter was one of explaining and characterizing human society. To understand men's relations with one another

in a social unit like the state, it was necessary to understand the psychology of the individuals who represented the atomic components of that unit. Social entities were in fact often conceived of as constructions, whose true nature could only be grasped by considering the purposes and claims of the individuals who had created them or who participated in their workings. And it seemed to follow from this, together with the premise affirming the constancy of human nature, that the problem of society and of man's place within it remains basically the same under all conditions and circumstances. Further, a correct analysis of what human beings in essence really are would (it was thought) make it possible, not merely to explain why men as a matter of fact organize themselves as they do, but also to arrive by rational argument at indisputable conclusions concerning the ways in which they ought to be organized. Thus the type of social theory in question did not purport to be only explanatory and descriptive; it purported to be prescriptive as well.

It is partly in terms of this background that the development of speculation about history in the last two hundred and fifty years has to be understood. In the first place, much of the historical theorizing which came to the fore during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflected in various forms some of the beliefs about the human mind and human society which are expressed in the writings of the great seventeenth-century philosophers. Of these, perhaps the most influential was the suggestion that social and psychological phenomena are subject to ascertainable laws and hence are in principle open to systematic treatment of the kind typified in the natural sciences. The idea of interpreting human history from such a standpoint inevitably had the most far-reaching consequences. On the one hand it was felt that history could not be regarded as a mere aggregate of events occurring in a form and order that was governed purely by contingency and chance; on the other, to look for a pattern or purpose in the historical process which required the postulation of some transcendent agency seemed to many equally objectionable. What was important was to grasp the operative factors in history in a spirit similar to that in which physical science had reached an understanding of the causal laws governing the events in nature. But what were these operative factors and how were they to be discovered?

In their attempts to answer this question eighteenth-century writers often displayed a certain ambivalence. At times they spoke as if the correct approach must be an empirical one: such laws as there might be could only be established by an appeal to the known facts of human history, and by the careful examination of different societies and comparison between the various stages of development through which men had passed. On the other hand, the emancipation from theological conceptions of a transcendental purpose realizing itself through the medium of historical events, of the kind exemplified in Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History* (1681), was not complete. The belief in some sort of teleological pattern underlying the facts of human history was explicitly maintained by Turgot, for example; in other writers similar ideas are often to be discerned beneath talk of "nature" and the workings of "nature," although it is not always easy to grasp what precise sense the writers of the Enlightenment intended their concept of the natural to have. At times it was used to refer to what has happened, or to what does or will happen, in a purely empirical way; at others, it seems to

have been used in some quasi-Aristotelian manner in order to indicate what can, in the light of reason, be recognized as meant to happen, and saying that something was in this sense meant to occur was to imply that it ought to occur. Even where teleological assumptions of this general character were not made, the attempt to exhibit the course of history as conforming to an ordered pattern was commonly conceived as being more than an affair of trying to discover general laws and uniformities amongst historical phenomena; it also tended to be assumed that history is moving in a particular direction, and that actual or apparent deviations from the path require explanation; they cannot be regarded simply as brute facts. The state of affairs towards which history was thought to be moving was, moreover, envisaged as a morally acceptable one; a writer like Condorcet does not consider the possibility of the future of mankind taking a form of which he would have disapproved, and this attitude was shared by other writers, even when they differed on the question of what in the end guaranteed or justified such optimism. Historical theorists of the eighteenth century, like their successors in the nineteenth, were for the most part men deeply concerned with questions of social and political reform, and it is hardly surprising if they sometimes treated history as if it were both the reflection of, and the warrant for, their various ideals.

Although moralistic and metaphysical currents may have flowed beneath the surface of much eighteenth-century speculation about history, a strong emphasis upon considerations of an empirical character remains its most striking feature. The notion that the course of human history as it had developed from the earliest times could be established—at any rate in its bare outlines—from the mere understanding of certain basic principles of human nature, and the accompanying belief that these principles could be arrived at independently of historical study and research—ideas of this kind were on the whole rejected, and in rejecting them the historians of the Enlightenment freed themselves from two assumptions which had found a place, in one form or another, in a certain amount of seventeenth-century political and legal thought. Again, when they postulated such factors as climate, geographical environment or the state of men's knowledge and opinion as having a decisive influence in determining the character of social and historical events, they attempted to support their hypotheses by an appeal to historical fact and evidence. And, side by side with their faith in human perfectibility and in the inevitability of historical progress, there is to be found a less apocalyptic but more practical belief; the view, namely, that through a proper understanding of the past it will become possible to control social phenomena in a manner similar to the physical scientist's ability to control nature.

In such ways writers like Turgot and Condorcet helped to set in a new light many of the problems that had arisen concerning the nature of man and society. Amongst other things, they cleared the path for the great nineteenth-century social theorists—men like Saint-Simon, Comte and Marx—by making the enterprise of creating a "science of social phenomena" seem a feasible one. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that such ideas and suggestions represented the whole, or even the most important part, of the contribution made by the eighteenth century to thought about history. This becomes particularly clear when one considers the works of authors who, while also trying to present a unitary picture of the historical process, did so from a point of view which stood outside

the main track of Enlightenment speculation and interest. In the writings of Vico and Herder, and to a lesser extent in those of Montesquieu, views are presented which diverge in a number of important respects from rationalist conceptions of how human nature and human society should be studied, and which have very different implications in the spheres both of historical method and of political theory.

It is significant that Vico explicitly rejected the mathematically inspired Cartesian criterion of true knowledge, denying that the test of clear and distinct conceptions was universally valid or applicable. Nor did he accept the view that propositions about human nature can be formulated which are necessarily true of all men at all times, these propositions being certifiable by, for example, tracing the implications of some abstract concept of *man*. And both Vico and Herder in different ways called in question the belief that what had been done in remote ages could be interpreted and judged according to yardsticks supplied by contemporary standards of rational thought and action. The importance of such ideas, embedded though they were in scholastic or mystical modes of expression, was to a large extent methodological: for it seemed clear to Vico, at least, that previous interpretations had been vitiated by a completely misconceived approach to the problems history provides, and that as a result men had succeeded only in imposing upon the past "pseudo-myths" concerning the origins of human institutions and social forms, myths which bore no relation to their actual manner of growth. More generally, it is mistaken to try to construct an artificial model of human nature and then seek to explain the past in terms of it: for history itself, having been made by men, is the plainest manifestation there could be of what man essentially is.

It is possible to see in ideas like these the traces of a new approach, an approach which was, amongst other things, opposed to attempts to subject the phenomena of history to the methods and procedures of natural science. Historical studies may be different from other types of inquiry, but they are not for that reason of an inferior status, nor does it follow that they should be "brought into line" with them. Despite his influence upon Marx and the strange similarity between some of his doctrines and the "positivistic" conceptions of Comte, Hegel can be regarded as expressing through the medium of an elaborate metaphysical system this very point. For Hegel's key concepts—the concepts in terms of which he professes to be able to describe the underlying character of the world—are concepts which play a central role in historical explanation and understanding. By assigning a pre-eminent position to notions like *reason*, *development*, *process* and *freedom*, by setting limits to the applicability of mathematical and quantitative conceptions, by drawing a sharp line between historical and "natural" phenomena, Hegel can be said (very roughly) to have done for history what the seventeenth-century metaphysicians did for natural science. It is illuminating, for example, to compare the part played by the notion of *substance* in seventeenth-century philosophy with the part played by the notion of *mind* or *spirit* in Hegel's system: what men do is understandable by us in a way in which the behavior of, say, the planets is not, and it would be reasonable to expect a philosopher impressed (as Hegel was) by developments in the human studies to emphasize what is presupposed by such understanding. This he did by extending certain ideas beyond the spheres within which they are ordinarily applied, making them the key to the interpretation of

"reality" as a whole. And (whatever criticisms may be made of Hegel's general philosophical procedure) he at least can be viewed as thereby providing an antidote to a type of thinking which was unrealistic so far as the actual practice of historians is concerned, in that through its preoccupation with the explanatory techniques of the physical sciences it tended to blur essential differences between historical and non-historical aims and procedures. Similarly, in formulating his own "dialectical" logic, he can be interpreted as trying to express a dissatisfaction with the belief that, because certain frameworks for describing and ordering our experience operate successfully in some domains, it follows that they are equally well-adapted to all departments of our knowledge.

The term "philosophy of history" has been applied somewhat indiscriminately to all speculative schemes of the type that have been mentioned. In making selections for the first half of this volume I have on the whole attempted to comply with this vague usage; but it is in many ways an unsatisfactory one, and a few warnings are in place. What projects customarily referred to as "philosophies of history" frequently have in common is the aim of giving a comprehensive account of the historical process in such a way that it can be seen to "make sense." Yet the notion of "making sense" of the past is itself unclear, and is open to a range of different interpretations. To make an obvious distinction: it is one thing to suppose that history has a *meaning* in the sense that all that has happened or is going to happen has been (or is) preordained or intended by some "hidden hand" —whether this hand be the hand of Providence or that of Hegel's "cunning of Reason"; it is quite another to suggest merely that its course up to date has shown a trend in a certain direction and (perhaps) to prophesy on the basis of this observed tendency what its future development will be; and it is another thing again to claim that historical events conform to particular causal laws, in terms of which past occurrences can be explained and future changes predicted. Further, while some theories of the historical process have been propounded, as it were, "in isolation," others can only be understood as forming part of a wider scheme in which they have a definite place: Hegel's theory, for example, falls into the latter category.

As a consequence of ambiguities like these the boundaries between what is known as "philosophy of history" and other fields of speculation and inquiry are exceedingly difficult to draw: at some points it seems to shade off into sociology, at others into historical methodology, and at others again into history proper. It is, in fact, misleading to speak as if there were a single branch of study called "The Philosophy of History," to which various thinkers have at different times made contributions; nor can the subject be defined by pointing to a specific group of pivotal problems, as could, perhaps, be done very roughly in the case of, say, the philosophy of morals. This is not altogether surprising. For whereas a great deal of philosophical inquiry and system-building in other areas has partly developed in response to the problems raised by certain puzzling concepts and by the relations holding between them, the factors that have most directly stimulated speculation about history have not been of this kind. To show how the stream of historical events forms a coherent pattern, to extend the techniques of science to new fields, to exhibit the realization in fact of certain political ideals, to justify and



illustrate particular methods of investigating the past; it is aims like these that have been the principal driving-force behind theories of history, and such variety of purpose has been reflected in a corresponding variety of form.

Yet, whatever the sources of these theories may have been, they themselves certainly did give rise to problems of a conceptual character. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers began to take seriously questions of criticism and appraisal which speculative projects and systems left in their wake; questions concerning the nature of historical knowledge, the relations between history and science, and the theoretical and practical possibility of providing comprehensive schemes within which the material of history can be systematically arranged. In tackling them, philosophers like Dilthey, Croce and, later, Collingwood were chiefly influenced by a desire to vindicate the "autonomy of history" as a branch of study in its own right, eliciting and emphasizing features of historical inquiry which, in their view, conclusively showed that it was fallacious to think that history either could, or should, emulate methods analogous to those adopted in the natural sciences. Their opinions on this score were often obscurely phrased: at the same time there can be little doubt that they raised a number of points of considerable importance concerning the implications of notions like *understanding* and *explanation* as these are used in the context of historical investigation. What is more, they saw how history may be a subject for philosophical examination in a sense quite different from that envisaged by the speculative philosopher-historians. They did not set themselves the task of trying to uncover a "meaning" or pattern in the historical process as a whole, but concentrated instead upon discussing the ways in which practicing historians in fact interpret their subject matter, attempting to reveal the presuppositions that underlie any piece of genuinely historical thinking.

Thus, by the opening of the present century, it may be said that "philosophy of history" had split into two distinct halves. Speculation and systematization continued to be found in the work of writers like Spengler and Toynbee; but, side by side with this, a quite separate form of inquiry had grown up, directed, amongst other things, towards the analysis of historical procedures, categories, and terms. It is with recent developments in the latter type of investigation that Part II of this volume is principally concerned.

# The Interpretation of the Historical Process

VICO (1668-1744)

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GIAMBATTISTA VICO was born in Naples in 1668. From an early age, he applied himself to the study of Roman law and history and Greek philosophy. He was also familiar with the ideas of the cultural "risorgimento" which emerged at Naples during the latter decades of the seventeenth century and which involved a general revolt against mediaevalism and a new attention to contemporary advances in philosophy, science and legal theory. In 1699 Vico was appointed to the Chair of Rhetoric at the University of Naples. His study in subsequent years of Plato, Tacitus, Bacon and Grotius played an essential role in the formation of his own thought, because he regarded their works both as posing interesting problems and also as involving certain errors of great importance: the essays he wrote between 1708 and 1725, particularly *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia* (1710) and *Diritto Universale* (1721-22), in various ways illustrate this concern, together with his growing preoccupation with the nature and history of law, poetry, myth and language. After an unsuccessful attempt to improve his academic status, Vico published the first edition of his main work, the *Scienza Nuova* (*New Science*) in 1725, and this was to appear again in a drastically revised edition in 1730. A third edition of the book appeared in 1744—the year of his death.

Vico's *New Science* is a work of genius, but it is only comparatively recently that its significance has been widely recognized. Although this was partly due to the unfamiliarity of the ideas it contained, it must also be said that the form in which Vico stated them does not make for easy understanding. Unsystematic and often obscure, his work is marked by suggestiveness and insight rather than by logical coherence and lucidity

of exposition. In this respect, as in so many others, he stands at the opposite pole from Descartes, whose procedure he had in mind when he wrote that it was a mistake to "subject everything to the method of geometry" and that the method we adopt must necessarily vary according to the things with which we are dealing.

Even now, Vico is chiefly known as the propounder of a cyclical theory of history, according to which human "nations" pass inevitably through certain distinguishable stages of development. But to treat this aspect of his writing in abstraction from his other leading ideas is to conceal the role it played in articulating his highly original contribution to historical thought. The extracts given here (all from the 1744 edition) have been chosen to illustrate some of Vico's principal themes; they are taken from the earlier parts of his book, where he was concerned to lay out, in the form of "Elements" and "Principles," the basic ideas which he later develops and applies. First, however, some general remarks on Vico's aims and methods.

Vico's concern with history was connected with a particular theory of knowledge. He believed that, really to know the nature of something, it was necessary to have made it. Unlike the world of natural objects and events, which "since God made it, he alone knows," the "world of nations," or human history, has in fact been created by men and is therefore something which men can "hope to know." In this way a line is drawn between history and natural science and a start made in trying to characterize the distinguishing features of historical enquiry in contrast to other branches of knowledge.

On the other hand, Vico did not want to suggest that human history is the product of minds exactly like our own and intelligible to us for that reason. On the contrary, human nature can itself only be understood through history, for history comprises the various ways in which men have expressed themselves at different times, and it is in such expressive forms that the human character directly reveals itself. It cannot be comprehended in terms of some artificial diagram of the human mind of the sort constructed by theorists on the model of men's present capacities and interests. The superimposition of such a picture upon the past has (Vico thinks) been a source of various errors and "pseudo-myths" concerning the outlooks and activities of human beings living in periods different from our own. Men have not always been as they are now; and Vico contrasts the rational or reflective "wisdom" of the later histories of nations with the "poetic wisdom"—spontaneous, imaginative, popular—of earlier times.

Once history is looked at in this altered perspective as expressing what Vico calls "the modifications of the human mind," it presents an appearance wholly unlike the one conventionally ascribed to it. Vico thinks it is quite false, for example, to imagine that poetry is essentially a product of relatively sophisticated times or that it has always played a purely "ornamental" part in the life of peoples; yet such things were widely believed. Equally it is naïve to regard political and legal institutions as owing their origin to acts of rational planning by our remote ancestors, motivated either by considerations of enlightened self-interest or by respect for an abstract conception of justice or "natural equity." In fact, such institutions can only be under-

stood when the facts of their history are properly investigated and interpreted by "philologists"\* capable of recreating imaginatively the character of the ages in which they arose. Philosophers, neglecting this, have been led by their reasonings into postulating as eternal truths recognized by all men at all times ideas which have only emerged as a consequence of long periods of historical development; as a result, their theories of law, language, the arts, the human mind itself, have all suffered from the same defects.

But how can the understanding of which Vico speaks be achieved? The *New Science* sets out certain guiding precepts and shows how they may be applied. History, as made by men, can be known by men, but only through imaginative effort and critical discernment is it possible to render the historical evidence and sources transparent, in the sense of recovering and recapturing the forms of thought and feeling they embody. Vico regarded every "nation" as passing through stages of development, attributing to each stage a distinctive character which pervades every department of human life and expression. To grasp the significance of this pattern ("the ideal eternal history"), in which ages dominated by religion and myth ("divine" and "heroic" periods) give way to later "civil" periods, is at the same time to recognize the fundamental principles of historical methodology, in the light of which the documents must be read and the remains deciphered. How Vico himself employed these principles is exhibited both in his treatment of ancient myths and traditions as providing clues to the ways of life and history of the people who created them and—perhaps most interestingly—in his interpretation of languages. For example, according to Vico, the ability to form class-concepts and use general terms, far from being an original capacity of the human mind, is a comparatively recent development: it was preceded by times when the unit of expression and communication was not the general word or concept but the individual "image" or particular object which embodies in concrete form the qualities and features of the things to which it refers. He thinks that we can come to a clearer realization of this if we consider the ways in which children think and talk. The key figures of legend and fable must be understood in terms of such a mentality; and, for similar reasons, Vico insists upon the need to recognize the metaphorical roots of the words in our own articulate speech and the part etymology can play in shedding light upon firms of life and experience previously inaccessible to our knowledge and comprehension.

In general Vico's approach to history signified a departure from interpretations which, starting from rationalistic or religious assumptions about the nature of the human mind or the universe, proceeded to derive the general course of historical events from these. But in this connection Vico's own references to "Providence" might seem to raise a difficulty: for does he not often speak of it as if he thought of historical events as being directed from outside by a transcendent agency? It is, however, consonant with much of what he says to suppose that he regarded the providential principle of which he speaks as being in some way integral to the historical process, and finally intelligible only in terms of that process. Whatever may have been

\*Vico defines as philologists "all the grammarians, historians, critics who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples" (§139).

the full implications Vico meant his notion of Providence to bear, the important thing to notice is the part it plays in his theory. For there it is largely used to express the idea of a determinate pattern or direction manifesting itself in the history of nations, which is at the same time unintended and unforeseen by historical individuals pursuing their purely private ends. And such a phenomenon may be described or characterized in purposive language without the existence of any individual human purpose being presupposed. Thus, to understand the action of Vico's Providence in this way would be to see the universal customs and "orders" which are established through the unreflective "common sense" of mankind as having the role of preserving human beings from lapsing into a condition of bestial savagery; or, again, to see the idea of God itself as having the role of restraining the rapacious nature of primitive man through the fear it excites. The movement from imaginative to rational conceptions, from political conditions necessarily based upon force to conditions founded upon principles of justice, from acceptance of privilege to recognition of law, which, in Vico's opinion, all nations exemplify, can be looked at in a similar fashion.

No set of extracts can do justice to the variety and originality of Vico's ideas. If today some of his remarks seem almost obvious, this only shows how far we have moved in a direction he was the first to indicate. It is this that makes it not unreasonable to regard his book, despite its many obscurities and eccentricities, as providing the ground-plan of a whole mode of thinking.

## The New Science\*

*Three Types of Government, Language, and Jurisprudence.* So this New Science or metaphysic, pondering the common nature of nations in the light of divine providence, having discovered such origins of divine and human things among the gentile nations, establishes thence a system of the natural law of nations, which proceeds with the greatest equality and constancy through the three ages which the Egyptians handed down to us as the three periods through which the world had passed up to their time. These are: (1) The age of the gods, in which the gentiles believed they lived under divine governments, and everything was commanded them by auspices and oracles, which are the oldest things in profane history. (2) The age of the heroes, in which they reigned everywhere in aristocratic

\* All extracts in this chapter are from Book I of Vico's *The New Science*, in the translation by T. C. Bergin and M. H. Fisch, copyright by Cornell University Press, with whose kind permission they are here reprinted.

commonwealths, on account of a certain superiority of nature which they held themselves to have over the plebs. (3) The age of men, in which all men recognized themselves as equal in human nature, and therefore there were established first the popular commonwealths and then the monarchies, both of which are forms of human government, as we observed a short while ago.

In harmony with these three kinds of nature and government, three kinds of language were spoken which compose the vocabulary of this Scieoce: (1) That of the time of the families when gentile men were newly received into humanity. This, we shall find, was a mute language of signs and physical objects having natural relations to the ideas they wished to express. (2) That spoken by means of heroic emblems, or similitudes, comparisons, images, metaphors, and natural descriptions, which make up the great body of the heroic language which was spoken at the time the heroes reigned. (3) Human language using words agreed upon by the people, a language of which they are absolute lords, and which is proper to the popular commonwealths and monarchical states; a language whereby the people may fix the meaning of the laws by which the nobles as well as the plebs are bound. Hence, among all nations, once the laws had been put into the vulgar tongue, the science of laws passed from the control of the nobles. . . .

Along with these three languages—proper to the three ages in which three forms of government prevailed, conforming to three types of civil natures, which succeed one another as the nations run their course—we find there went also in the same order a jurisprudence suited to each in its time.

Of these (three types of jurisprudence) the first was a mystic theology, which prevailed in the period when the gentiles were commanded by the gods. Its wise men were the theological poets (who are said to have founded gentile humanity) who interpreted the mysteries of the oracles, which among all nations gave their responses in verse. . . .

The second was the heroic jurisprudence, all verbal scrupulosity (in which Ulysses was manifestly expert). This jurisprudence looked to what the Roman juriconsults called civil equity and we call reason of state. With their limited ideas, the heroes thought they had a natural right to precisely what, how much and of what sort had been set forth in words; as even now we may observe in peasants and other crude men, who in conflicts between words and meanings obstinately say that their right stands for them in the words. . . .

The last type of jurisprudence was that of natural equity, which reigns naturally in the free commonwealths, where the peoples, each for its particular good (without understanding that it is the same for all), are led to command universal laws. They naturally desire these laws to bend benignly to the least details of matters calling for equal utility. . . .

*Philosophy and Philology.* Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes the authority of human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain.

This axiom by its second part defines as philologists all the grammarians,

historians, critics, who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples: both their domestic affairs, such as customs and laws, and their external affairs, such as wars, peaces, alliances, travels and commerce.

This same axiom shows how the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologists, and likewise how the latter failed by half in not taking care to give their authority the sanction of truth by appeal to the reasoning of the philosophers. If they had both done this they would have been more useful to their commonwealths and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this Science.

Human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities, which are the two origins of the natural law of nations.

Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class an entire people, an entire nation, or the whole human race. . . .

Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth.

This same axiom does away with all the ideas hitherto held concerning the natural law of nations, which has been thought to have originated in one nation and been passed on to others. This error was encouraged by the bad example of the Egyptians and Greeks in vainly boasting that they had spread civilization throughout the world. It was this error that gave rise to the fiction that the Law of the Twelve Tables came to Rome from Greece. If that had been the case, it would have been a civil law communicated to other peoples by human provision, and not a law which divine providence ordained naturally in all nations along with human customs themselves. Indeed it will be one of our constant labors throughout this book to demonstrate that the natural law of nations originated separately among the various peoples, each in ignorance of the others, and that subsequently, as a result of wars, embassies, alliances and commerce, it came to be recognized as common to the entire human race. . . .

Vulgar traditions must have had public grounds of truth, by virtue of which they came into being and were preserved by entire peoples over long periods of time.

It will be another great labor of this Science to recover these grounds of truth—truth which, in the passage of years and the changes in languages and customs, has come down to us enveloped in falsehood.

The vulgar tongues should be the most weighty witnesses concerning those ancient customs of the peoples that were observed at the time when the languages were being formed.

A language of an ancient nation, which has maintained itself as the dominant tongue throughout its development, should be a great witness to the customs of the early days of the world. . . .

If the poems of Homer are civil histories of ancient Greek customs, they will be two great treasure houses of the natural law of the nations of Greece.

*The Origin of Poetry and Fables.* Wherever a people has grown savage in arms so that human laws have no longer any place among it, the only powerful means of reducing it is religion.

This axiom establishes the fact that divine providence initiated the process by which the fierce and violent were brought from their outlaw state to humanity and entered upon national life. It did so by awaking in them a confused idea of divinity, which they in their ignorance attributed to that to which it did not belong. Thus through the terror of this imagined divinity, they began to put themselves in some order. . . .

When men are ignorant of the natural causes producing things, and cannot even explain them by analogy with similar things, they attribute their own nature to them. The vulgar, for example, say the magnet loves the iron.

This axiom is embraced by the first: namely, that the human mind, because of its indefinite nature, wherever it is lost in ignorance makes itself the rule of the universe in respect of everything it does not know.

The physics of the ignorant is a vulgar metaphysics by which they refer the causes of the things they do not know to the will of God without considering the means by which the divine will operates. . . .

Imagination is more robust in proportion as reasoning power is weak.

The most sublime labor of poetry is to give sense and passion to insensate things; and it is characteristic of children to take inanimate things in their hands and talk to them in play as if they were living persons.

This philologico-philosophical axiom proves to us that in the world's childhood men were by nature sublime poets. . . .

The human mind is naturally impelled to take delight in uniformity.

This axiom, as applied to the fables, is confirmed by the habit the vulgar have when making up fables of men famous for this or that, in these or those circumstances, of making the fable fit the character and occasion. These fables are ideal truths conforming to the merits of those of whom the vulgar tell them; and such falseness in fact as they now and then contain consists simply in failure to give their subjects their due. So that, if we consider the matter well, poetic truth is metaphysical truth, and physical truth which is not in conformity with it should be considered false. Thence springs this important consideration in poetic theory: the true war chief, for example, is the Godfrey that Torquato Tasso imagines; and all the chiefs who do not conform throughout to Godfrey are not true chiefs of war.

The nature of children is such that by the ideas and names associated with the first men, women and things they have known, they afterwards apprehend and name all the men, women and things which have any resemblance or relation to the first.

A truly golden passage is that above cited from Iamblichus *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* to the effect that the Egyptians attributed to Hermes Trismegistus all discoveries useful or necessary to human life. This statement, supported by the preceding axiom, will turn back to this divine philosopher all the senses of sublime natural theology that he himself attributed to the mysteries of the Egyptians.



These three axioms give us the origin of the poetic characters that constitute the essence of the fables. The first of the three shows the natural inclination of the vulgar to invent them, and to invent them appropriately. The second shows that the first men, the children as it were of the human race, not being able to form intelligible class-concepts of things, had a natural need to create poetic characters, that is, imaginative class-concepts or universals, by reducing to them as to certain models or ideal portraits all the particular species which resembled them. Because of the resemblance, the ancient fables could not but be created appropriately. Just so the Egyptians reduced to the genus "civil sage" all their inventions useful or necessary to the human race which are particular effects of civil wisdom, and because they could not abstract the intelligible genus "civil sage," much less the form of the civil wisdom in which these Egyptians were sages, they imaged it forth as Hermes Trismegistus. So far were the Egyptians, at the time when they were enriching the world with discoveries useful or necessary to the human race, from being philosophers and understanding universals or intelligible class-concepts! . . .

*The Order of Things and the Order of People.* The human mind is naturally inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to attend to itself by means of reflection.

This axiom gives us the universal principle of etymology in all languages: words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to express the things of the mind and spirit.

The order of ideas must follow the order of things.

This was the order of human things: first the forests, after that the huts, thence the villages, next the cities and finally the academies.

This axiom is a great principle of etymology, for this sequence of human things sets the pattern for the histories of words in the various native languages. Thus we observe in the Latin language that almost the whole corpus of its words had sylvan or rustic origins. For example, *lex*. First it must have meant "collection of acorns." Thence we believe is derived *illex*, as it were *illex*, "the oak" (as certainly *aquilex* is the "collector of waters"); for the oak produces the acorns by which the swine are drawn together. *Lex* was next "a collection of vegetables," from which the latter were called *legumina*. Later on, at a time when vulgar letters had not yet been invented for writing down the laws, *lex* by a necessity of civil nature must have meant "a collection of citizens" or the public parliament; so that the presence of the people was the law that solemnized the wills that were made *calatis comitiis*, in the presence of the assembled *comitia*. Finally collecting letters, and making as it were a sheaf of them in each word, was called *legere*, "reading." . . .

The nature of peoples is first crude, then severe, then benign, then delicate, finally dissolute.

In the human race first appear the huge and grotesque, like the cyclopes; then the proud and magnanimous, like Achilles; then the valorous and just, like Aristides and Scipio Africanus; nearer to us, imposing figures with

great semblances of virtue accompanied by great vices, who among the vulgar win a name for true glory, like Alexander and Caesar; still later, the melancholy and reflective, like Tiberius; finally the dissolute and shameless madmen, like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

This axiom shows that the first sort were necessary in order to make one man obey another in the family-state and prepare him to be law-abiding in the city-state that was to come; the second sort, who naturally did not yield to their peers, were necessary to establish the aristocratic commonwealths on the basis of the families; the third sort to open the way for popular liberty; the fourth to bring in the monarchies; the fifth to establish them; the sixth to overthrow them.

This with the preceding axioms gives a part of the principles of the ideal eternal history traversed in time by every nation in its rise, development, maturity, decline and fall. . . .

*Human Nature and Customs.* The remark of Dion Cassius (i.e. Chrysostom) is worthy of consideration, that custom is like a king and law like a tyrant; which we must understand as referring to reasonable custom and to law not animated by natural reason.

This axiom decides by implication the great dispute "whether law resides in nature or in the opinion of men," which comes to the same thing as that propounded in the corollary of the eighth axiom, "whether man is naturally sociable." In the first place, the natural law of nations was ordained by custom (which Dion says commands us by pleasure like a king) and not by law (which Dion says commands us by force like a tyrant). For it began in human customs springing from the common nature of all nations (which is the proper subject of our Science) and it preserves human society. Moreover, there is nothing more natural (for there is nothing more pleasant) than observing natural customs. For all these reasons, human nature, in which such customs have had their origin, is perforce sociable. . . .

*The Three Customs of All Nations.* But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never-failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could hope to know. This aberration was a consequence of that infirmity of the human mind, noted in the Axioms, by which, immersed and buried in the body, it naturally inclines to take notice of bodily things, and finds the effort to attend to itself too laborious; just as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself.

Now since this world of nations has been made by men, let us see in what things all men agree and always have agreed. For these things will be able to give us the universal and eternal principles (such as every sci-

ence must have) on which all nations were founded, and still preserve themselves.

We observe that all nations, barbarous as well as civilized, though separately founded because remote from each other in time and space, keep these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead. And in no nation, however savage and crude, are any human activities celebrated with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity than religion, marriage and burial. For, by the axiom that "uniform ideas, born among peoples unknown to each other, must have a common ground of truth," it must have been dictated to all nations that from these three institutions humanity began among them all, and therefore they must be most devoutly observed by them all, so that the world should not again become a bestial wilderness. For this reason we have taken these three eternal and universal customs as three first principles of this Science. . . .

*The New Science and Divine Providence.* But these first men, who later became the princes of the gentile nations, must have done their thinking under the strong impulsion of violent passions, as beasts do. We must therefore proceed from a vulgar metaphysics, such as we have mentioned in the Axioms and such as we shall find the theology of the poets to have been, and seek by its aid that frightful thought of some divinity which imposed form and measure on the bestial passions of these lost men and thus transformed them into human passions. From this thought must have sprung the impulse proper to the human will, to hold in check the motions impressed on the mind by the body, so as either to quiet them altogether, as becomes the sage, or at least to direct them to better use, as becomes the civil man. This control over the motion of their bodies is certainly an effect of the freedom of the human will, and thus of free will, which is the home and seat of all the virtues, and among the others of justice. When informed by justice, the will is the fount of all that is just and of all the laws dictated by justice. But to endow bodies with impulse amounts to giving them freedom to regulate their motions, whereas all bodies are by nature necessary agents. And what the theorists of mechanics call powers, forces, impulses, are insensible motions of bodies, by which they approach their centers of gravity, as ancient mechanics had it, or depart from their centers of motion, as modern mechanics has it.

But men because of their corrupted nature are under the tyranny of self-love, which compels them to make private utility their chief guide. Seeking everything useful for themselves and nothing for their companions, they cannot bring their passions under control to direct them toward justice. We thereby establish the fact that man in the bestial state desires only his own welfare; having taken wife and begotten children, he desires his own welfare along with that of his family; having entered upon civil life, he desires his own welfare along with that of his city; when its rule is extended over several peoples, he desires his own welfare along with that of the nation; when the nations are united by wars, treaties of peace, alliances and commerce, he desires his own welfare along with that of the

entire human race. In all these conditions man desires principally his own utility. Therefore it is only by divine providence that he can be held within these orders to practice justice as a member of the society of the family, the state, and finally of mankind. Unable to attain all the utilities he wishes, he is constrained by these orders to seek those which are his due; and this is called just. That which regulates all human justice is therefore divine justice, which is administered by divine providence to preserve human society.

In one of its principal aspects, this Science must therefore be a rational civil theology of divine providence, which seems hitherto to have been lacking. For the philosophers have either been altogether ignorant of it, as the Stoics and the Epicureans were, the latter asserting that human affairs are agitated by a blind concourse of atoms, the former that they are drawn by a deaf (inexorable) chain of cause and effect; or they have considered it solely in the order of natural things, giving the name of natural theology to the metaphysics in which they contemplate this attribute (i.e. the providence) of God, and in which they confirm it by the physical order observed in the motions of such bodies as the spheres and the elements and in the final cause observed in other and minor natural things. But they ought to have studied it in the economy of civil things, in keeping with the full meaning of applying to providence the term divinity, from *divinari*, to divine; that is, to understand what is hidden from men, the future, or what is hidden in them, their consciousness. It is this that makes up the first and principal part of the subject matter of jurisprudence, namely the divine things on which depend the human things which make up its other and complementary part. Our new Science must therefore be a demonstration, so to speak, of the historical fact of providence, for it must be a history of the forms of order which, without human discernment or intent, and often against the designs of men, providence has given to this great city of the human race. For though this world has been created in time and particular, the orders established therein by providence are universal and eternal.

In contemplation of this infinite and eternal providence our Science finds certain divine proofs by which it is confirmed and demonstrated. Since divine providence has omnipotence as minister, it develops its orders by means as easy as the natural customs of men. Since it has infinite wisdom as counselor, whatever it establishes is order. Since it has for its end its own immeasurable goodness, whatever it ordains must be directed to a good always superior to that which men have proposed to themselves.

In the deplorable obscurity of the beginnings of the nations and in the innumerable variety of their customs, for a divine argument which embraces all human things, no sublimer proofs can be desired than those provided by the aforesaid naturalness, order and end (the preservation of the human race). These proofs will become luminous and distinct when we reflect with what ease things are brought into being, by occasions arising far apart and sometimes quite contrary to the proposals of men, yet fitting together of themselves. Such proofs omnipotence affords. Compare the

things with one another and observe the order by which those are now born in their proper times and places which ought now to be born, and others deferred for birth in theirs (and all the beauty of order, according to Horace, consists in this). Such proofs eternal wisdom provides. Consider, finally, if in these occasions, places and times we can conceive how other divine benefits could arise by which, in view of the particular needs and ills of men, human society could be better conducted or preserved. Such proofs the eternal goodness of God will give. . . .

These sublime proofs of natural theology will be confirmed for us by the following sorts of logical proofs. In reasoning of the origins of things divine and human in the gentile world, we reach those first beginnings beyond which it is vain curiosity to demand others earlier; and this is the defining character of (first) principles. We explain the particular ways in which they come into being, that is to say, their nature, the explanation of which is the distinguishing mark of science. And finally (these proofs) are confirmed by the eternal properties (the things) preserve, which could not be what they are if the things had not come into being just as they did, in those particular times, places and fashions, which is to say with those particular natures. . . .

In search of these natures of human things our Science proceeds by a severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life, which are the two perennial springs of the natural law of nations, as we have remarked in the Axioms. In its second principal aspect, our Science is therefore a history of human ideas, on which it seems the metaphysics of the human mind must proceed. . . .

To determine the times and places for such a history, that is, when and where these human thoughts were born, and thus to give it certainty by means of its own (so to speak) metaphysical chronology and geography, our Science applies a likewise metaphysical art of criticism with regard to the founders of these same nations, in which it took more than a thousand years for those writers to come forward with whom philological criticism has hitherto been occupied. And the criterion our criticism employs, in accordance with an axiom above stated, is that taught by divine providence and common to all nations, namely the common sense of the human race, determined by the necessary harmony of human things, in which all the beauty of the civil world consists. The decisive sort of proof in our Science is therefore this: that, once these orders were established by divine providence, the course of the affairs of the nations had to be, must now be and will have to be such as our Science demonstrates, even if infinite worlds were produced from time to time through eternity, which is certainly not the case.

Our Science therefore comes to describe at the same time an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, progress, maturity, decline and fall. Indeed we go so far as to assert that whoever meditates this Science tells himself this ideal eternal history only so far as he makes it by that proof "it had, has, and will have to be." For the first indubitable principle above posited is that this world of nations

has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also describes them. Thus our Science proceeds exactly as does geometry, which, while it constructs out of its elements or contemplates the world of quantity, itself creates it; but with a reality greater in proportion to that of the orders having to do with human affairs, in which there are neither points, lines, surfaces, nor figures. And this very fact is an argument, O reader, that these proofs are of a kind divine, and should give thee a divine pleasure; since in God knowledge and creation are one and the same thing.

## KANT (1724-1804)

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IMMANUEL KANT was born at Königsberg in 1724. He attended Königsberg University from 1740 as a theological student, but he chiefly studied philosophy and mathematics. After a period during which he acted as tutor in distinguished families, he returned to lecture at the university, finally becoming professor in 1770, when he gave courses in a wide range of subjects dealing not only with metaphysics and logic, but also with natural science, geography, anthropology, physics and mathematics. He died in 1804.

Kant's major works are, of course, concerned with problems in metaphysics and epistemology, morals and aesthetics; and in his analysis of knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* it was scientific and mathematical knowledge that he had in mind. Nevertheless, in 1784 he published a short essay on history, to which he gave the cumbersome title of "Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View." This essay is of interest for a number of reasons. It expresses very clearly the motives which have given rise to many, more elaborate, "philosophies of history"; it exhibits in a skeleton form the type of reasoning which frequently underlies such theories; and it is a characteristic product of its time in embodying a belief in human progress and in relying upon a clear-cut conception of human nature and its place in the general scheme of things. Kant throughout implies that, if the course of human history is to make sense, we must assume the working of some "secret plan" or teleological principle according to which the immediate evils of history can be seen as justified by what they eventually helped to promote: an idea that proved highly

attractive to many of Kant's successors (including Hegel) but which was in fact criticized by his contemporary, Herder. The principle he has in mind he calls "Nature"; Nature has implanted certain capacities in human beings in order that they may be developed, and human history exhibits the mechanisms by which Nature ensures the development of these capacities. The spring of this mechanism is to be found in the anti-social propensities of men, propensities which, on account of the miseries and wars they produce, must eventually drive men into constructing and submitting to a form of society that will guarantee by law the maximum freedom for each of its members which is compatible with the freedom of the rest.

Kant's essay will be seen to be infused with a moral idealism that is typical of his thought on political and social subjects. But it also shows the qualified and cautious manner in which he regarded his suggestion; it is only acceptable if certain assumptions are made. Nor do Kant's other writings give us any reason for thinking that he supposed these assumptions in any way represented demonstrable matters of fact. Thus his general approach is in an important respect unlike that of more self-confident historical metaphysicians, to whose work on this subject his brief essay bears points of resemblance. Kant was sensitive to the difficulties of any such enterprise.

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### **Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View\***

Whatever metaphysical theory may be formed regarding the freedom of the will, it holds equally true that the manifestations of the will in human actions are determined, like all other external events, by universal natural laws. Now history is occupied with the narration of these manifestations as facts, however deeply their causes may lie concealed. Hence in view of this natural principle of regulation, it may be hoped that when the play of the freedom of the human will is examined on the great scale of universal history a regular march will be discovered in its movements; and that, in this way, what appears to be tangled and unregulated in the case of individuals will be recognized in the history of the whole species as a continually advancing, though slow, development of its original capacities and endowments. Thus marriages, births and deaths appear to be incapable of being reduced to any rule by which their numbers might

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\*This essay is reprinted in the translation by W. Hastie.

be calculated beforehand, on account of the great influence which the free will of man exercises upon them; and yet the annual statistics of great countries prove that these events take place according to constant natural laws. In this respect they may be compared with the very inconstant changes of the weather, which cannot be determined beforehand in detail, but which yet, on the whole, do not fail to maintain the growth of plants, the flow of rivers and other natural processes, in a uniform uninterrupted course. Individual men, and even whole nations, little think, while they are pursuing their own purposes—each in his own way and often one in direct opposition to another—that they are advancing unconsciously under the guidance of a purpose of nature which is unknown to them, and that they are toiling for the realization of an end which, even if it were known to them, might be regarded as of little importance.

Men, viewed as a whole, are not guided in their efforts merely by instinct, like the lower animals; nor do they proceed in their actions, like the citizens of a purely rational world, according to a preconcerted plan. And so it appears as if no regular systematic history of mankind would be possible, as in the case, for instance, of bees and beavers. Nor can one help feeling a certain repugnance in looking at the conduct of men as it is exhibited on the great stage of the world. With glimpses of wisdom appearing in individuals here and there, it seems, on examining it externally as if the whole web of human history were woven out of folly and childish vanity and the frenzy of destruction, so that at the end one hardly knows what idea to form of our race, albeit so proud of its prerogatives. In such circumstances there is no resource for the philosopher but, while recognizing the fact that a rational conscious purpose cannot be supposed to determine mankind in the play of their actions as a whole, to try whether he cannot discover a universal purpose of nature in this paradoxical movement of human things, and whether in view of this purpose a history of creatures who proceed without a plan of their own may nevertheless be possible according to a determinate plan of nature. We will accordingly see whether we can succeed in finding a clue to such a history; and, in the event of doing so, we shall then leave it to nature to bring forth the man who will be fit to compose it. Thus she did bring forth a Kepler, who, in an unexpected way, reduced the eccentric paths of the planets to definite laws; and then she brought forth a Newton, who explained those laws by a universal natural cause.

#### FIRST PROPOSITION

All the capacities implanted in a creature by nature are destined to unfold themselves, completely and conformably to their end, in the course of time.

This proposition is established by observation, external as well as internal or anatomical, in the case of all animals. An organ which is not to be used, or an arrangement which does not attain its end, is a contradiction in the teleological science of nature. For, if we turn away from that fundamental principle, we have then before us a nature moving



without a purpose, and no longer conformable to law; and the cheerless gloom of chance takes the place of the guiding light of reason.

#### SECOND PROPOSITION

In man, as the only rational creature on earth, those natural capacities which are directed toward the use of his reason could be completely developed only in the species and not in the individual.

Reason, in a creature, is a faculty of which it is characteristic to extend the laws and purposes involved in the use of all its powers far beyond the sphere of natural instinct, and it knows no limit in its efforts. Reason, however, does not itself work by instinct, but requires experiments, exercise and instruction in order to advance gradually from one stage of insight to another. Hence each individual man would necessarily have to live an enormous length of time in order to learn by himself how to make a complete use of all his natural endowments. Otherwise, if nature should have given him but a short lease of life—as is actually the case—reason would then require the production of an almost inconceivable series of generations, the one handing down its enlightenment to the other, in order that her germs, as implanted in our species may be at last unfolded to that stage of development which is completely conformable to her inherent design. And the point of time at which this is to be reached must, at least in idea, form the goal and aim of man's endeavors, because his natural capacities would otherwise have to be regarded as, for the most part, purposeless and bestowed in vain. But such a view would abolish all our practical principles, and thereby also throw on nature the suspicion of practicing a childish play in the case of man alone, while her wisdom must otherwise be recognized as a fundamental principle in judging of all other arrangements.

#### THIRD PROPOSITION

Nature has willed that man shall produce wholly out of himself all that goes beyond the mechanical structure and arrangement of his animal existence, and that he shall participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself, apart from instinct, by his own reason.

Nature, according to this view, does nothing that is superfluous, and is not prodigal in the use of means for her ends. As she gave man reason and freedom of will on the basis of reason, this was at once a clear indication of her purpose in respect of his endowments. With such equipment, he was not to be guided by instinct nor furnished and instructed by innate knowledge; much rather must he produce everything out of himself. The invention of his own covering and shelter from the elements and the means of providing for his external security and defense,—for which nature gave him neither the horns of the bull, nor the claws of the lion, nor the fangs of the dog,—as well as all the sources of delight which could make life agreeable, his very insight and prudence, and even the goodness of his will, all these were to be entirely his own work. Nature seems to have

taken pleasure in exercising her utmost parsimony in this case and to have measured her animal equipments very sparingly. She seems to have exactly fitted them to the most necessitous requirements of the mere beginning of an existence, as if it had been her will that man, when he had at last struggled up from the greatest crudeness of life to the highest capability and to internal perfection in his habit of thought, and thereby also—so far as it is possible on earth—to happiness, should claim the merit of it as all his own and owe it only to himself. It thus looks as if nature had laid more upon his rational self-esteem than upon his mere well-being. For in this movement of human life a great host of toils and troubles wait upon man. It appears, however, that the purpose of nature was not so much that he should have an agreeable life, but that he should carry forward his own self-culture until he made himself worthy of life and well-being. In this connection it is always a subject of wonder that the older generations appear only to pursue their weary toil for the sake of those who come after them, preparing for the latter another stage on which they may carry higher the structure which nature has in view; and that it is to be the happy fate of only the latest generations to dwell in the building upon which the long series of their forefathers have labored, without so much as intending it and yet with no possibility of participating in the happiness which they were preparing. Yet, however mysterious this may be, it is as necessary as it is mysterious when we once accept the position that one species of animals was destined to possess reason, and that, forming a class of rational beings mortal in all the individuals but immortal in the species, it was yet to attain to a complete development of its capacities.

#### FOURTH PROPOSITION

The means which nature employs to bring about the development of all the capacities implanted in men is their mutual antagonism in society, but only so far as this antagonism becomes at length the cause of an order among them that is regulated by law.

By this antagonism I mean the unsocial sociability of men; that is, their tendency to enter into society, conjoined, however, with an accompanying resistance which continually threatens to dissolve this society. The disposition for this manifestly lies in human nature. Man has an inclination to socialize himself by associating with others, because in such a state he feels himself more than a natural man, in the development of his natural capacities. He has, moreover, a great tendency to individualize himself by isolation from others, because he likewise finds in himself the unsocial disposition of wishing to direct everything merely according to his own mind; and hence he expects resistance everywhere, just as he knows with regard to himself that he is inclined on his part to resist others. Now it is this resistance or mutual antagonism that awakens all the powers of man, that drives him to overcome all his propensity to indolence, and that impels him, through the desire of honor or power or wealth, to strive after rank among his fellow men—whom he can neither bear to interfere with himself, nor yet let alone. Then the first real steps are taken from the rudeness of

barbarism to the culture of civilization, which particularly lies in the social worth of man. All his talents are now gradually developed, and with the progress of enlightenment a beginning is made in the institution of a mode of thinking which can transform the crude natural capacity for moral distinctions, in the course of time, into definite practical principles of action; and thus a pathologically constrained combination into a form of society is developed at last to a moral and rational whole. Without those qualities of an unsocial kind out of which this antagonism arises—which viewed by themselves are certainly not amiable but which every one must necessarily find in the movements of his own selfish propensities—men might have led an Arcadian shepherd life in complete harmony, contentment and mutual love, but in that case all their talents would have forever remained hidden in their germ. As gentle as the sheep they tended, such men would hardly have won for their existence a higher worth than belonged to their domesticated cattle; they would not have filled up with their rational nature the void remaining in the creation, in respect of its final end. Thanks be then to nature for this unsociableness, for this envious jealousy and vanity, for this insatiable desire of possession or even of power. Without them all the excellent capacities implanted in mankind by nature would slumber eternally undeveloped. Man wishes concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species, and she will have discord. He wishes to live comfortably and pleasantly; but nature wills that, turning from idleness and inactive contentment, he shall throw himself into toil and suffering even in order to find out remedies against them, and to extricate his life prudently from them again. The natural impulses that urge man in this direction, the sources of that unsociableness and general antagonism from which so many evils arise, do yet at the same time impel him to new exertion of his powers, and consequently to further development of his natural capacities. Hence they clearly manifest the arrangement of a wise Creator, and do not at all, as is often supposed, betray the hand of a malevolent spirit that has deteriorated His glorious creation, or spoiled it from envy.

#### FIFTH PROPOSITION

The greatest practical problem for the human race, to the solution of which it is compelled by nature, is the establishment of a civil society, universally administering right according to law.

It is only in a society which possesses the greatest liberty, and which consequently involves a thorough antagonism of its members—with, however, the most exact determination and guarantee of the limits of this liberty in order that it may coexist with the liberty of others—that the highest purpose of nature, which is the development of all her capacities, can be attained in the case of mankind. Now nature also wills that the human race shall attain through itself to this, as to all the other ends for which it was destined. Hence a society in which liberty under external laws may be found combined in the greatest possible degree with irresistible power, or a perfectly just civil constitution, is the highest natural

problem prescribed to the human species. And this is so because nature can only by means of the solution and fulfillment of this problem realize her other purposes with our race. A certain necessity compels man, who is otherwise so greatly prepossessed in favor of unlimited freedom, to enter into this state of coercion and restraint. Indeed, it is the greatest necessity of all that does this; for it is created by men themselves whose inclinations made it impossible for them to exist long beside each other in wild, lawless freedom. But in such a complete growth as the civil union these very inclinations afterward produce the best effects. It is with them as with the trees in a forest; for just because every one strives to deprive the other of air and sun they compel each other to seek them both above, and thus they grow beautiful and straight; whereas those that in freedom and apart from one another shoot out their branches at will grow stunted and crooked and awry. All the culture and art that adorn humanity and the fairest social order are fruits of that unsociableness which is necessitated of itself to discipline itself and which thus constrains man, by compulsive art, to develop completely the germs of his nature.

#### SIXTH PROPOSITION

This problem is likewise the most difficult of its kind, and it is the latest to be solved by the human race.

The difficulty which the mere idea of this problem brings into view is that man is an animal, and if he lives among others of his kind he has need of a master. For he certainly misuses his freedom in relation to his fellow men; and although as a rational creature he desires a law which may set bounds to the freedom of all, yet his own selfish animal inclinations lead him, wherever he can, to except himself from it. He, therefore, requires a master to break his self-will and compel him to obey a will that is universally valid, and in relation to which every one may be free. Where, then, does he obtain this master? Nowhere but in the human race. But this master is an animal too, and also requires a master. Begin, then, as he may, it is not easy to see how he can procure a supreme authority over public justice that would be essentially just, whether such an authority may be sought in a single person or in a society of many selected persons. The highest authority has to be just in itself, and yet to be a man. This problem is, therefore, the most difficult of its kind; and, indeed, its perfect solution is impossible. Out of such crooked material as man is made of, nothing can be hammered quite straight. So it is only an approximation to this idea that is imposed upon us by nature.\* It further follows that this problem is the last to be practically worked out, because it requires correct

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\*The part that has to be played by man is, therefore, a very artificial one. We do not know how it may be with the inhabitants of other planets or what are the conditions of their nature; but, if we execute well the commission of nature, we may certainly flatter ourselves to the extent of claiming a not insignificant rank among our neighbors in the universe. It may perhaps be the case that in those other planets every individual completely attains his destination in this life. With us it is otherwise; only the species can hope for this.

conceptions of the nature of a possible constitution, great experience founded on the practice of ages, and above all a good will prepared for the reception of the solution. But these three conditions could not easily be found together; and if they are found it can only be very late in time, and after many attempts to solve the problem have been made in vain.

#### SEVENTH PROPOSITION

The problem of the establishment of a perfect civil constitution is dependent on the problem of the regulation of the external relations between the states conformably to law; and without the solution of this latter problem it cannot be solved.

What avails it to labor at the arrangement of a commonwealth as a civil constitution regulated by law among individual men? The same unsociableness which forced men to it becomes again the cause of each commonwealth's assuming the attitude of uncontrolled freedom in its external relations, that is, as one State in relation to other States; and consequently any one State must expect from any other the same sort of evils as oppressed individual men and compelled them to enter into a civil union regulated by law. Nature has accordingly again used the unsociableness of men, and even of great societies and political bodies, her creatures of this kind, as a means to work out through their mutual antagonism a condition of rest and security. She works through wars, through the strain of never-relaxed preparation for them, and through the necessity which every State is at last compelled to feel within itself, even in the midst of peace, to begin some imperfect efforts to carry out her purpose. And, at last, after many devastations, overthrows and even complete internal exhaustion of their powers, the nations are driven forward to the goal which reason might easily have impressed upon them, even without so much sad experience. This is none other than the advance out of the lawless state of savages and the entering into a federation of nations. It is thus brought about that every State, including even the smallest, may rely for its safety and its rights not on its own power or its own judgment of right, but only on this great international federation (*foedus amphictionum*), on its combined power and on the decision of the common will according to laws. However visionary this idea may appear to be—and it has been ridiculed in the way in which it has been presented by an Abbé de St. Pierre or Rousseau (perhaps because they believed its realization to be so near)—it is nevertheless the inevitable issue of the necessity in which men involve one another. For this necessity must compel the nations to the very resolution—however hard it may appear—to which the savage in his uncivilized state was so unwillingly compelled when he had to surrender his brutal liberty and seek rest and security in a constitution regulated by law.

All wars are, accordingly, so many attempts—not, indeed, in the intention of men, but yet according to the purpose of nature—to bring about new relations between the nations; and by destruction, or at least dismemberment, of them all to form new political corporations. These new organizations, again, are not capable of being preserved either in themselves or

beside one another, and they must therefore pass in turn through similar new revolutions, till at last, partly by the best possible arrangement of the civil constitution within, and partly by common convention and legislation without, a condition will be attained, which, in the likeness of a civil commonwealth and after the manner of an automaton, will be able to preserve itself.

Three views may be put forward as to the way in which this condition is to be attained. In the first place, it may be held that from an Epicurean concourse of causes in action it is to be expected that the States, like little particles of matter, will try by their fortuitous conjunctions all sorts of formations, which will be again destroyed by new collisions, till at last some one constitution will by chance succeed in preserving itself in its proper form,—a lucky accident which will hardly ever come about! In the second place, it may rather be maintained that nature here pursues a regular march in carrying our species up from the lower stage of animality to the highest stage of humanity, and that this is done by a compulsive art that is inherent in man, whereby his natural capacities and endowments are developed in perfect regularity through an apparently wild disorder. Or, in the third place, it may even be asserted that out of all these actions and reactions of men as a whole nothing at all—or at least nothing rational—will ever be produced; that it will be in the future as it has ever been in the past, and that no one will ever be able to say whether the discord which is so natural to our species may not be preparing for us, even in this civilized state of society, a hell of evils at the end; nay, that it is not perhaps advancing even now to annihilate again by barbaric devastation this actual state of society and all the progress hitherto made in civilization,—a fate against which there is no guarantee under a government of blind chance, identical as it is with lawless freedom in action, unless a connecting wisdom is covertly assumed to underlie the system of nature.

Now, which of these views is to be adopted depends almost entirely on the question whether it is rational to recognize harmony and design in the parts of the constitution of nature, and to deny them of the whole. We have glanced at what has been done by the seemingly purposeless state of savages; how it checked for a time all the natural capacities of our species, but at last by the very evils in which it involved mankind it compelled them to pass from this state, and to enter into a civil constitution, in which all the germs of humanity could be unfolded. And, in like manner, the barbarian freedom of the States, when once they were founded, proceeded in the same way of progress. By the expenditure of all the resources of the commonwealth in military preparations against each other, by the devastations occasioned by war, and still more by the necessity of holding themselves continually in readiness for it, the full development of the capacities of mankind is undoubtedly retarded in their progress; but, on the other hand, the very evils which thus arise, compel men to find out means against them. A law of equilibrium is thus discovered for the regulation of the really wholesome antagonism of contiguous States as it springs up out of their freedom; and a united power, giving emphasis to this law, is

constituted, whereby there is introduced a universal condition of public security among the nations. And that the powers of mankind may not fall asleep, this condition is not entirely free from danger; but it is at the same time not without a principle which operates, so as to equalize the mutual action and reaction of these powers, that they may not destroy each other. Before the last step of bringing in a universal union of the States is taken—and accordingly when human nature is only halfway in its progress—it has to endure the hardest evils of all, under the deceptive semblance of outward prosperity; and Rousseau was not so far wrong when he preferred the state of the savages, if the last stage which our race has yet to surmount be left out of view. We are cultivated in a high degree by science and art. We are civilized, even to excess, in the way of all sorts of social forms of politeness and elegance. But there is still much to be done before we can be regarded as moralized. The idea of morality certainly belongs to real culture; but an application of this idea which extends no farther than the likeness of morality in the sense of honor and external propriety merely constitutes civilization. So long, however, as States lavish all their resources upon vain and violent schemes of aggrandizement, so long as they continually impede the slow movements of the endeavor to cultivate the newer habits of thought and character on the part of the citizens, and even withdraw from them all the means of furthering it, nothing in the way of moral progress can be expected. A long internal process of improvement is thus required in every commonwealth as a condition for the higher culture of its citizens. But all apparent good that is not grafted upon a morally good disposition is nothing but mere illusion and glittering misery. In this condition the human race will remain until it shall have worked itself, in the way that has been indicated, out of the existing chaos of its political relations.

#### EIGHTH PROPOSITION

The history of the human race, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about a political constitution, internally, and, for this purpose, also externally perfect, as the only state in which all the capacities implanted by her in mankind can be fully developed.

This proposition is a corollary from the preceding proposition. We see by it that philosophy may also have its millennial view, but in this case the chiliasm is of such a nature that the very idea of it—although only in a far-off way—may help to further its realization; and such a prospect is, therefore, anything but visionary. The real question is whether experience discloses anything of such a movement in the purpose of nature. I can only say it does a little; for the movement in this orbit appears to require such a long time till it goes full round that the form of its path and the relation of its parts to the whole can hardly be determined out of the small portion which the human race has yet passed through in this relation. The determination of this problem is just as difficult and uncertain as it is to calculate from all previous astronomical observations what course our sun, with

the whole host of his attendant train, is pursuing in the great system of the fixed stars, although on the ground of the total arrangement of the structure of the universe and the little that has been observed of it, we may infer, confidently enough, the reality of such a movement. Human nature, however, is so constituted that it cannot be indifferent even in regard to the most distant epoch that may affect our race, if only it can be expected with certainty. And such indifference is the less possible in the case before us when it appears that we might by our own rational arrangements hasten the coming of this joyous period for our descendants. Hence the faintest traces of the approach of this period will be very important to ourselves. Now the States are already in the present day involved in such close relations with each other that none of them can pause or slacken in its internal civilization without losing power and influence in relation to the rest; and hence the maintenance, if not the progress, of this end of nature is, in a manner, secured even by the ambitious designs of the States themselves. Further, civil liberty cannot now be easily assailed without inflicting such damage as will be felt in all trades and industries, and especially in commerce; and this would entail a diminution of the powers of the State in external relations. This liberty, moreover, gradually advances further. But if the citizen is hindered in seeking his prosperity in any way suitable to himself that is consistent with the liberty of others, the activity of business is checked generally; and thereby the powers of the whole State are again weakened. Hence the restrictions on personal liberty of action are always more and more removed, and universal liberty even in religion comes to be conceded. And thus it is that, notwithstanding the intrusion of many a delusion and caprice, the spirit of enlightenment gradually arises as a great good which the human race must derive even from the selfish purposes of aggrandizement on the part of its rulers, if they understand what is for their own advantage. This enlightenment, however, and along with it a certain sympathetic interest which the enlightened man cannot avoid taking in the good which he perfectly understands, must by and by pass up to the throne and exert an influence even upon the principles of government. Thus although our rulers at present have no money to spend on public educational institutions, or in general on all that concerns the highest good of the world—because all their resources are already placed to the account of the next war—yet they will certainly find it to be to their own advantage at least not to hinder the people in their own efforts in this direction, however weak and slow these may be. Finally, war itself comes to be regarded as a very hazardous and objectionable undertaking, not only from its being so artificial in itself and so uncertain as regards its issue on both sides, but also from the after-pains which the State feels in the ever-increasing burdens it entails in the form of national debt—a modern infliction—which it becomes almost impossible to extinguish. And to this is to be added the influence which every political disturbance of any State of our continent—linked as it is so closely to others by the connections of trade—exerts upon all the States and which becomes so observable that they are forced by their common danger, al-



though without lawful authority, to offer themselves as arbiters in the troubles of any such State. In doing so, they are beginning to arrange for a great future political body, such as the world has never yet seen. Although this political body may as yet exist only in a rough outline, nevertheless a feeling begins, as it were, to stir in all its members, each of which has a common interest in the maintenance of the whole. And this may well inspire the hope that, after many political revolutions and transformations, the highest purpose of nature will be at last realized in the establishment of a universal cosmopolitical institution, in the bosom of which all the original capacities and endowments of the human species will be unfolded and developed.

#### NINTH PROPOSITION

A philosophical attempt to work out the universal history of the world according to the plan of nature in its aiming at a perfect civil union must be regarded as possible, and as even capable of helping forward the purpose of nature.

It seems, at first sight, a strange and even an absurd proposal to suggest the composition of a history according to the idea of how the course of the world must proceed, if it is to be conformable to certain rational laws. It may well appear that only a romance could be produced from such a point of view. However, if it be assumed that nature, even in the play of human freedom, does not proceed without plan and design, the idea may well be regarded as practicable; and, although we are too shortsighted to see through the secret mechanism of her constitution, yet the idea may be serviceable as a clue to enable us to penetrate the otherwise planless aggregate of human actions as a whole, and to represent them as constituting a system. For the idea may so far be easily verified. Thus, suppose we start from the history of Greece, as that by which all the older or contemporaneous history has been preserved, or at least accredited to us.\* Then, if we study its influence upon the formation and malformation of the political institutions of the Roman people, which swallowed up the Greek states, and if we further follow the influence of the Roman Empire upon the Barbarians who destroyed it in turn, and continue this investigation down to our own day, conjoining with it episodically the political history of other peoples according as the knowledge of them has gradually reached us through these more enlightened nations, we shall discover a regular movement of progress through the political institutions of our

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\*It is only a learned public which has had an uninterrupted existence from its beginning up to our time that can authenticate ancient history. Beyond it, all is *terra incognita*; and the history of the peoples who lived out of its range can only be begun from the date at which they entered within it. In the case of the Jewish people this happened in the time of the Ptolemies through the Greek translation of the Bible, without which little faith would have been given to their isolated accounts of themselves. From that date taken as a beginning, when it has been determined, their records may then be traced upward. And so it is with all other peoples. The first page of Thucydides, says Hume, is the beginning of all true history.

continent, which is probably destined to give laws to all other parts of the world. Applying the same method of study everywhere, both to the internal civil constitutions and laws of the States and to their external relations to each other, we see how in both relations the good they contained served for a certain period to elevate and glorify particular nations, and with themselves their arts and sciences,—until the defects attaching to their institutions came in time to cause their overthrow. And yet their very ruin leaves always a germ of growing enlightenment behind, which, being further developed by every revolution, acts as a preparation for a subsequent higher stage of progress and improvement. Thus, as I believe, we can discover a clue which may serve for more than the explanation of the confused play of human things, or for the art of political prophecy in reference to future changes in States,—a use which has been already made of the history of mankind, even although it was regarded as the incoherent effect of an unregulated freedom! Much more than all this is attained by the idea of human history viewed as founded upon the assumption of a universal plan in nature. For this idea gives us a new ground of hope, as it opens up to us a consoling view of the future, in which the human species is represented in the far distance as having at last worked itself up to a condition in which all the germs implanted in it by nature may be fully developed, and its destination here on earth fulfilled. Such a justification of nature—or rather, let us say, of Providence—is no insignificant motive for choosing a particular point of view in contemplating the course of the world. For what avails it to magnify the glory and wisdom of the creation in the irrational domain of nature, and to recommend it to devout contemplation, if that part of the great display of the supreme wisdom which presents the end of it all in the history of the human race is to be viewed as only furnishing perpetual objections to that glory and wisdom? The spectacle of history if thus viewed would compel us to turn away our eyes from it against our will; and the despair of ever finding a perfect rational purpose in its movement would reduce us to hope for it, if at all, only in another world.

This idea of a universal history is no doubt to a certain extent of an *a priori* character, but it would be a misunderstanding of my object were it imagined that I have any wish to supplant the empirical cultivation of history, or the narration of the actual facts of experience. It is only a thought of what a philosophical mind—which, as such, must be thoroughly versed in history—might be induced to attempt from another standpoint. Besides, the praiseworthy circumstantiality with which our history is now written may well lead one to raise the question as to how our remote posterity will be able to cope with the burden of history as it will be transmitted to them after a few centuries. They will surely estimate the history of the oldest times, of which the documentary records may have been long lost, only from the point of view of what will interest them; and no doubt this will be what the nations and governments have achieved, or failed to achieve, in the universal world-wide relation. It is well to be giving thought

to this relation; and at the same time to draw the attention of ambitious rulers and their servants to the only means by which they can leave an honorable memorial of themselves to latest times. And this may also form a minor motive for attempting to produce such a philosophical history.

## HERDER (1744-1803)

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JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER was born in 1744 in the small East Prussian town of Mohrungen. After a Lutheran childhood, he attended Königsberg University, where he listened to Kant's lectures on philosophy; he was also impressed by Kant's views on the influences of climatic and geographical factors upon human development. In 1767 he was appointed minister at two of the chief churches in Riga, a position which he resigned in 1769. He spent a short time in France, only to return to Germany, and to become Chief Pastor to the Count of Schaumburg-Lippe at Bückeburg. Here he met Goethe, and the resulting friendship was of profound significance for the future work of both men. In 1776 he went to Weimar, holding important religious offices under the Duke Karl August. He died in 1803.

Herder wrote a number of essays and books on a wide variety of subjects—historical, theological, literary, linguistic—of which some of the best known, apart from his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91), are *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (essays on Shakespeare and on ancient poetry, 1773), *Volkslieder* (a collection of folksongs, 1779), and *Gott* (conversations on Spinoza, 1787). Two of his last writings were bitter attacks on the Kantian philosophy, which he never properly understood, and regarded as being thoroughly misguided.

Herder was a passionate and restless man, dissatisfied both with his own achievements and with the age in which he lived. Yet his ideas were of very great importance, especially in connection with the development of the Romantic movement: his belief, for example, that the literature of a nation must be true to the inner character and traditions of that nation, and his attitude towards nature. But it was perhaps in his view of history that he contributed most towards the formation of the Romantic mode of thought. This involved a break with the assumption that human thought and behavior can be interpreted as conforming to a uniform pattern throughout different historical periods; and it also implied a rejection of the practice of judging past

ages from contemporary moral or cultural standpoints. Herder's historical thinking is on the whole impregnated by the conviction that it is the variety and individuality displayed by different nations which is history's most striking feature. It is thus misleading to discuss history as if it were the manifestation of certain very general features of human nature; nor should it primarily be regarded as the exhibition of lessons to be learned and errors to be avoided in the way suggested by some writers of the Enlightenment, although Herder was not averse to considering it as a "school" in the sense that the contemplation of past achievements and creations can inspire men of later times to strive after the particular forms of perfection which they are capable of realizing.

The following extracts have been chosen to illustrate some of Herder's principal ideas: his emphasis on the importance of the concepts of national character and of milieu in describing and interpreting historical development and change; his stress upon impartiality and sympathetic understanding in the historian; his belief in laws of growth and decay governing the evolution of the national "organism"; the range and catholicity of his appreciation of different cultural forms; finally, the need he sees for men to observe the limits imposed by historical situation and circumstance.

## Ideas toward a Philosophy of the History of Man\*

*The Principal Law of History.* What is the principal law, that we have observed in all the great occurrences of history? In my opinion it is this: *that everywhere on our Earth whatever could be has been, according to the situation and wants of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people.* Admit active human powers, in a determinate relation to the age, and to their place on the Earth, and all the vicissitudes in the history of man will ensue. Here kingdoms and states crystallize into shape: there they dissolve, and assume other forms. Here from a wandering horde rises a Babylon: there from the straitened inhabitants of a coast springs up a Tyre: here, in Africa, an Egypt is formed: there, in the deserts of Arabia, a Jewish state: and all these in one part of the World, all in the neighborhood of each other. Time, place, and national character alone, in short the general

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\* This selection comprises Chapter VI, Book XII, portions of Chapter VII, Book XIII, and the Introduction and portions of Chapters I and V, Book XV, of Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. The translation, first published in 1803, is by T. Churchill.

cooperation of active powers in their most determinate individuality, govern all the events that happen among mankind, as well as all the occurrences in nature. Let us place this predominant law of the creation in a suitable light.

1. *Active human powers are the springs of human history:* and as man originates from and in one race, his figure, education, and mode of thinking, are thus genetic. Hence that striking national character, which, deeply imprinted on the most ancient people, is unequivocally displayed in all their operations on the Earth. As a mineral water derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavour, from the soil through which it flows; so the ancient character of nations arose from the family features, the climate, the way of life and education, the early actions and employments, that were peculiar to them. The manners of the fathers took deep root, and became the internal prototype of the race. The mode of thinking of the Jews, which is best known to us from their writings and actions, may serve as an example: in the land of their fathers, and in the midst of other nations, they remain as they were; and even when mixed with other people they may be distinguished for some generations downward. It was, and it is the same with all the nations of antiquity, Egyptians, Chinese, Arabs, Hindoos, etc. The more secluded they lived, nay frequently the more they were oppressed, the more their character was confirmed: so that, if every one of these nations had remained in its place, the Earth might have been considered as a garden, where in one spot one human national plant, in another, another, bloomed in its proper figure and nature; where in this spot one species of animal, in that, another, pursued its course according to its instincts and character.

But as men are not firmly rooted plants, the calamities of famine, earthquakes, war, and the like, must in time remove from their place to some other more or less different. And though they might adhere to the manners of their forefathers with an obstinacy almost equal to the instinct of the brute, and even apply to their new mountains, rivers, towns, and establishments, the names of their primitive land; it would be impossible for them, to remain eternally the same in every respect, under any considerable alteration of soil and climate. Here the transplanted people would construct a wasp's nest, or anthill, after their own fashion. The style would be a compound arising from the ideas imbibed in their original country, and those inspired by the new: and this may commonly be called the youthful bloom of the nation. Thus did the Phœnicians, when they retired from the Red Sea to the shores of the Mediterranean: thus Moses endeavoured to form the Israelites: and so has it been with several Asiatic nations; for almost every people upon Earth has migrated at least once, sooner or later, to a greater distance, or a less. It may readily be supposed, that in this much depended on the time when the migration took place, the circumstances by which it was occasioned, the length of the way, the previous state of civilization of the people, the reception they met with in their new country, and the like. Thus even in unmixed nations the

computations of history are so perplexed, from geographical and political causes, that it requires a mind wholly free from hypothesis to trace the clue. This clue is most easily lost by one, with whom a particular race of the people is a favourite, and who despises everything, in which this race has no concern. The historian of mankind must see with eyes as impartial as those of the creator of the human race, or the genius of the Earth, and judge altogether uninfluenced by the passions. To the naturalist, who would acquire a just knowledge and arrangement of all his classes, the rose and the thistle, the polecat, the sloth, and the elephant, are equally dear; he examines that most, from which most is to be learned. Now Nature has given the whole Earth to mankind, her children; and allowed every thing, that place, time, and power would permit, to spring up thereon. Every thing that can exist, exists; every thing that is possible to be produced, will be produced; if not to day, yet to morrow. Nature's year is long: the blossoms of her plants are as various as the plants themselves, and the elements by which they are nourished.

2. If the complexion of a kingdom thus depend principally on *the time and place in which it arose, the parts that composed it, and the external circumstances by which it was surrounded*, we perceive the chief part of its fate spring also from these. A monarchy framed by wandering tribes whose political system is a continuatum of their former mode of life, will scarcely be of long duration: it ravages, and subjugates, till at last itself is destroyed: the capture of the metropolis, or frequently the death of a king alone, is sufficient to drop the curtain on the predatory scene. Thus it was with Babylon and Nineveh, with Eebatana and Persepolis, and so it is with Persia still. The empire of the great moguls in Hindostan is nearly at an end: and that of the Turks will not be lasting, if they continue chaldeans, that is foreign conquerors, and do not establish their government on a more moral foundation. Though the tree lift its head to the skies, and overshadow whole quarters of the Globe, if it be not rooted in the earth, a single blast of wind may overturn it. It may fall through the undermining of a treacherous slave, or by the axe of a daring satrap. Both the ancient and modern histories of Asia are filled with these revolutions; and thus the philosophy of states finds little to learn in them. Despots are hurled from the throne, and despots exalted to it again: the kingdom is annexed to the person of the monarch, to his tent, to his crown: he who has these in his power is the new father of the people, that is the leader of an overbearing band of robbers. A Nebuchadnezzar was terrible to the whole of Hither Asia, and under his second successor his unstable throne lay prostrate in the dust. Three victories of an Alexander completely put an end to the vast Persian monarchy.

It is not so with states, which, springing up from a root, rest on themselves: they may be subdued, but the nation remains. Thus it is with China: we well know how much labor it cost its conquerors, to introduce there a simple custom, the Mongol mode of cutting the hair. Thus it is with the Brahmins and Jews, whose ceremonial systems will eternally sep-

arate them from all the nations upon Earth. Thus Egypt long withstood any intermixture with other nations: and how difficult was it to extirpate the Phœnicians, merely because they were a people rooted in this spot! Had Cyrus succeeded in founding an empire like those of Yao, Chrishna, and Moses, it would still survive, though mutilated, in all its members.

3. Finally, from the whole region over which we have wandered, we perceive how *transitory all human structures are, nay how oppressive the best institutions become in the course of a few generations.* The plant blossoms, and fades; your fathers have died, and mouldered into dust: your temple is fallen: your tabernacle, the tables of your law are no more; language itself, that bond of mankind, becomes antiquated: and shall a political constitution, shall a system of government or religion, that can be erected solely on these, endure for ever? If so, the wings of Time must be enchained, and the revolving Globe hang fixed, an idle ball of ice over the abyss. What should we say now, were we to see King Solomon sacrifice twenty two thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep, at a single festival? or hear the queen of Sheba trying him with riddles at an entertainment? What should we think of the wisdom of the Egyptians, when the bull Apis, the sacred cat, and the sacred goat, were shown to us in the most splendid temples? It is the same with the burdensome ceremonies of the Brahmins, the superstitions of the Parsees, the empty pretensions of the Jews, the senseless pride of the Chinese, and everything that rests on antiquated human institutions of three thousand years date. The doctrines of Zoroaster may have been a praiseworthy attempt, to account for the evil in the World and animate his contemporaries to all the deeds of light: but what is his theodicy now, even in the eyes of a Mohammedan? The metempsychosis of the Brahmins may have its merit as a juvenile dream of the imagination, desirous of retaining the immortal soul within the sphere of observation, and uniting moral sentiments with the well-meant notion: yet has it not become an absurd religious law, with its thousand additions of precepts and practices? Tradition in itself is an excellent institution of Nature, indispensable to the human race: but when it fetters the thinking faculty both in politics and education, and prevents all progress of the intellect, and all the improvement, that new times and circumstances demand, it is the true narcotic of the mind, as well to nations and sects, as to individuals. Asia, the mother of all the mental illumination of our habitable Earth, has drunk deep of this pleasant poison, and handed the cup to others. Great states and sects sleep in it, as, according to the fable, Saint John sleeps in his grave: he breathes softly, though he died almost two thousand years ago, and slumbering waits till his awakener shall come. . . .

*Reflections on the History of Greece.* As the botanist cannot obtain a complete knowledge of a plant, unless he follow it from the seed, through its germination, blossoming, and decay; such is the Grecian history to us: it is only to be regretted, that, according to the usual course, it is yet far from having been studied like that of Rome. At present it is my place, to

indicate, from what has been said, some points of view in this important fragment of general history, which most immediately present themselves to the eye of observation: and here I must repeat the first grand principle: *Whatever can take place among mankind, within the sphere of given circumstances of time, place, and nation, actually does take place.* Of this Greece affords the simplest and most beautiful proofs.

In natural philosophy we never reckon upon miracles: we observe laws, which we perceive every where equally effectual, undeviating, and regular. And shall man, with his powers, changes, and passions, burst these chains of nature? Had Greece been peopled with Chinese, our Greece would never have existed: had our Greeks been fixed where Darius led the enslaved Eretrians, they would have formed no Athens, they would have produced no Sparta. Behold Greece now: the ancient Greeks are no more to be seen; nay frequently their country no longer appears. If a remnant of their language were not still spoken; if marks of their way of thinking, if ruins of their cities and works of art, or at least their ancient rivers and mountains, were not still visible: it might be supposed, that Greece was not less fabulous, than the island of Calypso, or the gardens of Aleinous. But as the modern Greeks have become what they are only by the course of time, through a given series of causes and effects, so did the ancient; and not less every other nation upon Earth. The whole history of mankind is a pure natural history of human powers, actions, and propensities, modified by time and place.

This principle is not more simple, than it is luminous and useful, in treating of the history of nations. Every historian agrees with me, that a barren wonder and recital deserve not the name of history: and if this be just, the examining mind must exert all its acumen on every historical event, as on a natural phenomenon. Thus in the narration of history it will seek the strictest truth; in forming its conceptions and judgment, the most complete connexion: and never attempt to explain a thing which is, or happens, by a thing which is not. With this rigorous principle, every thing ideal, all the phantoms of a magic creation, will vanish: it will endeavour to see simply what is: and as soon as this is seen, the causes why it could not be otherwise will commonly appear. As soon as the mind has acquired this habit in history, it will have found the way to that sound philosophy, which rarely occurs except in natural history and mathematics.

This philosophy will first and most eminently guard us from attributing the facts, that appear in history, to the particular hidden purposes of a scheme of invisible powers, which we would not venture to name in connexion with natural phenomena. Fate reveals its purposes through the events that occur, and as they occur: accordingly, the investigator of history develops these purposes merely from what is before him, and what displays itself in its whole extent. Why did the enlightened Greeks appear in the World? Because Greeks existed; and existed under such circumstances, that they could not be otherwise than enlightened. Why did Alexander invade India? Because he was Alexander, the son of Philip;



and from the dispositions his father had made, the deeds of his nation, his age and character, his reading of Homer, etc., knew nothing better, that he could undertake. But if we attribute his bold resolution to the secret purposes of some superior power, and his heroic achievements to his peculiar fortune; we run the hazard, on the one hand, of exalting his most senseless and atrocious actions into designs of the deity; and, on the other, of detracting from his personal courage, and military skill; while we deprive the whole occurrence of its natural form. He who takes with him into natural history the fairy belief, that invisible sylphs tinge the rose, or hang its cup with pearly dew-drops, and that little spirits of light encase themselves in the body of the glow-worm, or wanton in the peacock's tail, may be an ingenious poet, but will never shine as a naturalist or historian. History is the science of what is, not of what possibly may be according to the hidden designs of fate.

Secondly. *What is true of one people, holds equally true with regard to the connexion of several together: they are joined as time and place unites them; they act upon one another, as the combination of active powers directs.*

The Greeks have been acted upon by the Asiatics, and the Asiatics reacted upon by the Greeks. They have been conquered by Romans, Goths, Christians, and Turks: and Romans, Goths, and Christians have derived from them various means of improvement. How are these things consistent? Through place, time, and the natural operation of active powers. The Phoenicians imparted to them the use of letters: but they had not invented letters for them; they imparted them by sending a colony into Greece. So it was with the Hellenes and Egyptians; so with the Greeks that migrated to Bactra; so with all the gifts of the muse, which we have received from their hands. Homer sung; but not for us; yet as his works have reached us, and are in our possession, we could not avoid being instructed by him. Had any event in the course of time deprived us of these, as we have been deprived of many other excellent works, who would accuse some secret purpose of fate, when the natural cause of the loss was apparent? Let a man take a view of the writings that are lost, and those that remain, of the works of art that are destroyed, and those that are preserved, with the accounts that are given of their destruction and preservation, and venture to point out the rule, which fate has followed in transmitting to us these, and depriving us of those. Aristotle was preserved in a single copy under ground, other writings as waste parchments in chests and cellars, the humourist Aristophanes under the pillow of St. Chrysostom, who learned from him to compose homilies; and thus the whole of the cultivation of our minds has depended precisely upon the most trivial and precarious circumstances. . . .

Thirdly. *The cultivation of a people is the flower of its existence; its display is pleasing indeed, but transitory.*

As man, when he comes into the World, knows nothing, but has all his knowledge to learn; so an uncultivated people acquires knowledge from

its own practice, or from intercourse with others. But every kind of human knowledge has its particular circle, that is its nature, time, place, and periods of life. The cultivation of Greece, for example, grew with time, place, and circumstances, and declined with them. Poetry and certain arts preceded philosophy: where oratory or the fine arts flourished, neither the patriotic virtues, nor martial spirit, could shine with their highest splendour: the orators of Athens displayed the greatest enthusiasm, when the state drew near its end, and its integrity was no more.

But all kinds of human knowledge have this in common, that each aims at a point of perfection, which, when attained by a concatenation of fortunate circumstances, it can neither preserve to eternity, nor can it instantly return, but a decreasing series commences. Every perfect work, as far as perfection can be required from man, is the highest of its kind: nothing, therefore, can possibly succeed it, but more imitations, or unsuccessful attempts to excel. When Homer had sung, no second Homer in the same path could be conceived: he plucked the flower of the epic garland, and all who followed must content themselves with a few leaves. Thus the Greek tragedians chose another track: they ate, as Aeschylus says, at Homer's table, but prepared for their guests a different feast. They too had their day: the subjects of tragedy were exhausted, and their successors could do no more, than remould the greatest poets, that is, give them in an inferior form; for the best, the supremely beautiful form of the Grecian drama had already been exhibited in those models. . . .

Poor and mean would it be, if our attachment to any object of human culture would prescribe as a law to alldisposing providence, to confer an unnatural eternity on that moment, in which alone it could take place. Such a wish would be nothing less, than to annihilate the essence of time, and destroy the infinitude of all nature. Our youth returns not again: neither returns the action of our mental faculties as they then were. The very appearance of the flower is a sign, that it must fade: it has drawn to itself the powers of the plant from the very root; and when it dies, the death of the plant must follow. Unfortunate would it have been, could the age, that produced a Pericles and a Socrates, have been prolonged a moment beyond the time, which the chain of events prescribed for its duration: for Athens it would have been a perilous, an insupportable period. Equally confined would be the wish, that the mythology of Homer should have held eternal possession of the human mind, the gods of the Greeks have reigned to infinity, and their Demosthenes have thundered for ever. Every plant in nature must fade; but the fading plant scatters abroad its seeds, and thus renovates the living creation. Shakespeare was no Sophocles, Milton no Homer, Bolingbroke no Pericles: yet they were in their kind, and in their situation, what those were in theirs. Let every one, therefore, strive in his place, to be what he can be in the course of things: this he will be, and to be any thing else is impossible.

Fourthly. *The health and duration of a state rest not on the point of its highest cultivation, but on a wise or fortunate equilibrium of its active*

living powers. The deeper in this living exertion its centre of gravity lies, the more firm and durable it is.

On what did those ancient founders of states calculate? Neither on lethargic indolence, nor on extreme activity; but on order, and a just distribution of never slumbering, ever vigilant powers. The principle of these sages was genuine human wisdom, learned from nature. Whenever a state was pushed to its utmost point, though by a man of the greatest eminence, and under the most flattering pretext, it was in danger of ruin, and recovered its former state only by some happy violence. . . .

All the splendour of Greece was created by the active operation of many states and living energies: every thing sound and permanent, on the contrary, in its taste, and in its constitution, was produced by a wise and happy equilibrium of its active powers. The success of its institutions was uniformly more noble and permanent, in proportion as they were founded on humanity, that is, reason and justice. . . .

*Perplexities of History.* "Thus every thing in history is transient: the inscription on her temple is, evanescence and decay. We tread on the ashes of our forefathers, and stalk over the entombed ruins of human institutions and kingdoms. Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, flit before us like shadows: like ghosts they rise from their graves, and appear to us in the field of history.

"When any political body has outlived its maturity, who would not wish it a quiet dissolution? Who does not shudder, when, in the circle of living active powers, he stumbles over the graves of ancient institutions, which rob the living of light, and narrow their habitations? And when the present race has cleared away these catacombs, how soon will its institutions have a similar appearance to another, and be in like manner levelled with the earth!

"The cause of this transitoriness of all terrestrial things lies in their essence, in the place they inhabit, and in the general laws, to which our nature is subject. Man's body is a fragile, ever-renovating shell, which at length can renew itself no longer: but his mind operates upon Earth only in and with the body. We fancy ourselves independent; yet we depend on all nature: implicated in a chain of incessantly fluctuating things, we must follow the laws of its permutation, which are nothing more than to be born, exist, and die. A slender thread connects the human race, which is every moment breaking, to be tied anew. The sage, whom time has made wise, sinks into the grave; that his successor may likewise begin his course as a child, perhaps madly destroy the work of his father, and leave to his son the same vain toil, in which he too consumes his days. Thus year run into year: thus generations and empires are linked together. The Sun sets, that night may succeed, and mankind rejoice at the beams of a new morn.

"Now were any advancement observable in all this, it would be something: but where is it to be found in history? In it we everywhere perceive destruction, without being able to discern, that what rises anew is better than what was destroyed. Nations flourish and decay: but in a

faded nation no new flower, not to say a more beautiful one, ever blooms. Cultivation proceeds; yet becomes not more perfect by progress: in new places new capacities are developed; the ancient of the ancient places irrevocably pass away. Were the Romans more wise, or more happy, than the Greeks? are we more so than either?

"The nature of man remains ever the same: in the ten thousandth year of the World he will be born with passions, as he was born with passions in the two thousandth, and ran through his course of follies to a late, imperfect, useless wisdom. We wander in a labyrinth, in which our lives occupy but a span; so that it is to us nearly a matter of indifference, whether there be any entrance or outlet to the intricate path.

"Melancholy fate of the human race! with all their exertions chained to an Ixion's wheel, to Sisyphus's stone, and condemned to the prospect of a Tantalus. We must will; and we must die, without having seen the fruit of our labors ripen, or learned a single result of human endeavors from the whole course of history. If a people stand alone, its characters wear away under the hand of Time: if it come into collision with others, it is thrown into the crucible, where its impression is equally effaced. Thus we hew out blocks of ice; thus we write on the waves of the sea: the wave glides by, the ice melts; our palaces, and our thoughts, are both no more.

"To what purpose then the unblessed labor, to which God has condemned man as a daily task during his short life? To what purpose the burden, under which every one toils on his way to the grave; while no one is asked, whether he will take it up or not, whether he will be born on this spot, at this period, and in this circle, or no? Nay, as most of the evils among mankind arise from themselves, from their defective constitutions and governments, from the arrogance of oppressors, and from the almost inevitable weakness both of the governors and the governed; what fate was it, that subjected man to the yoke of his fellows, to the mad or foolish will of his brother? Let a man sum up the periods of the happiness and unhappiness of nations, their good and bad rulers, nay the wisdom and folly, the predominance of reason and of passion, in the best: how vast will be the negative number! Look at the despots of Asia, of Africa, nay of almost the whole Earth: behold those monsters on the throne of Rome, under whom a World groaned for centuries: note the troubles and wars, the oppressions and tumults, that took place, and mark the event. A Brutus falls, and an Anthony triumphs: a Germanicus dies, and a Tiberius, a Caligula, a Nero, reign: Aristides is banished: Confucius is a wanderer upon the Earth: Socrates, Phocion, Seneca, are put to death. Every where, it must be confessed, is discovered the proposition: "what is, is; what can be, will be; what is susceptible of dissolution, dissolves:" a melancholy confession, however, which universally proclaims, that rude Violence, and his sister, malignant Cunning, are everywhere victorious upon Earth."

Thus man doubts, and redoubts, after much apparent historical experience: nay, this melancholy complaint has in a certain degree the super-

ficies of all earthly occurrences in its favor: hence I have known many, who on the wide ocean of human history imagined they had lost that god, whom on the firm ground of natural knowledge they beheld with their mental eye in every stalk of grass, in every grain of dust, and adored with overflowing heart. In the temple of the earthly creation, every thing appeared to them full of omnipotence, and benevolent goodness: in the theatre of human actions, on the contrary, for which the periods of our life are calculated, they beheld nothing but a stage of conflicting sensual passions, brutal powers, destructive arts, or evanescent good purposes. To them history is a spider's web, in a corner of the mundane mansion, the intricate threads of which display abundant traces of destructive rapine, while its melancholy centre, the spider by which it was spun, no where appears.

Yet, if there be a god in nature, there is in history too: for man is also a part of the creation, and in his wildest extravagances and passions must obey laws, not less beautiful and excellent than those, by which all the celestial bodies move. Now as I am persuaded, that man is capable of knowing, and destined to attain the knowledge of every thing, that he ought to know; I step freely and confidently from the tumultuous scenes, through which we have been wandering, to inspect the beautiful and sublime laws of nature, by which they have been governed.

*Humanity Is the End of Human Nature.* The end of whatever is not merely a dead instrument must be implicated in itself. Were we created, to strive with eternally vain endeavors after a point of perfection external to ourselves, and which we could never reach, as the magnet turns to the north; we might not only pity ourselves as blind machines, but the being likewise, that had condemned us to such a state of tantalism, in forming us for the purpose of such a malignant and diabolical spectacle. Should we say in his exculpation, that some good at least was promoted, and our nature preserved in perpetual activity, by these empty endeavors, incapable of ever attaining their object; it must be an imperfect, ferocious being, that could deserve such an exculpation: for in activity that never attain its end can lie no good; and he has weakly or maliciously deceived us, by placing before our eyes such a dream, from a purpose unworthy of him. But happily we are taught no such doctrine by the nature of things: if we consider mankind as we know them, and according to the laws that are intrinsic to them, we perceive nothing in man superior to humanity; for even if we think of angels, or of gods, we conceive them as ideal, superior men.

We have seen,\* that our nature is evidently organized to this end: for it our finer senses and instincts, our reason and liberty, our delicate yet durable health, our language, art, and religion, were bestowed. In all states, in all societies, man has had nothing in view, and could aim at nothing else, but humanity, whatever may have been the idea he formed of it. For it, the arrangements of sex, and the different periods of life, were

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\*Book IV.

made by nature; that our childhood might be of long continuance, and we might learn a kind of humanity by means of education. For it, all the different modes of life, throughout the wide World, have been established, all the forms of society introduced. Hunter, or fisherman, shepherd, husbandman, or citizen, in every state man has learned to discriminate food, and construct habitations for himself and his family; to clothe and adorn either sex, and regulate his domestic economy. He invented various laws, and forms of government, the object of all which was, that every one might exercise his faculties, and acquire a more pleasing and free enjoyment of life, undisturbed by others. For this purpose, property was secured, and labor, arts, trade, and an extensive intercourse between persons, facilitated: punishments were invented for culprits, rewards for the deserving; and numberless moral practices for people of different classes, in public and private life, and even in religion, were established. For this, wars were carried on, treaties were made; by degrees a sort of nations and of war, and various compacts of hospitality and commerce were framed, so that man might meet compassion and respect beyond the confines of his own country. Thus whatever good appears in history to have been accomplished, humanity was the gainer; whatever foolish, vicious, or execrable, was perpetrated, ran counter to humanity: so that in all his earthly institutions man can conceive no other end, than what lies in himself, that is, in the weak or strong, base or noble nature, that God gave him. Now if throughout the whole creation we know nothing, except by what it is, and what it effects, man's end upon Earth is shown us by his nature and history, as by the clearest demonstration.

Let us take a retrospect of the regions, over which we have been wandering; in all the civil establishments from China to Rome, in all the varieties of their political constitutions, in every one of their inventions, whether of peace or war, and even in all the faults and barbarities that nations have committed, we discern the grand law of nature: let man be man; let him mould his condition according as to himself shall seem best. For this nations took possession of their land, and established themselves in it as they could. Of women and of the state, of slaves, clothing, and habitations, of recreation and food, of science and of art, every thing has been made, in the different parts of the Earth, that man thought was capable of being made for his own or for the general good. Thus we every where find mankind possessing and exercising the right of forming themselves to a kind of humanity, as soon as they have discerned it. If they have erred, or stopped at the half way of an hereditary tradition; they have suffered the consequences of their error, and done penance for the fault they committed. The deity has in nowise hounded their hands, farther than by what they were, by time, place, and their intrinsic powers. When they were guilty of faults, he extricated them not by miracles, but suffered these faults to produce their effects, that man might the better learn to know them.

This law of nature is not more simple, than it is worthy of God, consistent, and fertile in its consequences to mankind. Were man intended

to be what he is, and to become what he was capable of becoming, he must preserve a spontaneity of nature, and be encompassed by a sphere of free actions, disturbed by no preternatural miracle. All inanimate substances, every species of living creature that instinct guides, have remained what they were from the time of the creation: God made man a deity upon Earth; he implanted in him the principle of self-activity, and set this principle in motion from the beginning, by means of the internal and external wants of his nature. Man could not live and support himself, without learning to make use of his reason: no sooner, indeed, did he begin to make use of this, than the door was opened to a thousand errors and mistaken attempts; but at the same time, and even through these very mistakes and errors, the way was cleared to a better use of his reason. The more speedily he discerned his faults, the greater the promptitude and energy with which he applied to correct them: the farther he advanced, the more his humanity was formed; and this must be formed, or he must groan for ages beneath the burden of his mistakes.

We see, too, that Nature has chosen as wide a field for the establishment of this law, as the abode of mankind would allow: she organized man as variously as the human species could be organized on this Earth. She placed the negro close to the ape; and she offered for solution the grand problem of humanity, to all people, of all times, from the intellect of the aethiop to the most refined understanding. Scarcely a nation upon Earth is without the necessities of life, to which want and instinct guide: for the greater refinement of man's condition more genial climates produce a race of finer mould. But as all beauty and perfection of order lie in the midst of two extremes; the most beautiful form of reason and humanity must find its place in the temperate middle region. And this it has abundantly found, according to the natural law of this general fitness. For though scarcely any of the Asiatic nations can be absolved from that indolence, which rested satisfied too early with good institutions, and regarded hereditary forms as sacred and unalterable; yet they must be excused, when the vast extent of their continent is considered, together with the circumstances to which they were exposed, particularly beyond the mountains. Upon the whole, their first attempts at the promotion of humanity, early as they were, considered each in its place and time, deserve praise; and still less can we refrain from acknowledging the progress made by the more active nations on the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. These shook off the despotic yoke of ancient forms of government and traditions, and gave thereby an example of the great and good law of human destiny: that, whatever a nation, or a whole race of men, wills for its own good with firm conviction, and pursues with energy, Nature, who has set up for man's aim neither despots nor traditions, but the best form of humanity, will assuredly grant.

The fundamental principle of this divine law of nature reconciles us wonderfully not only with the appearance of our species all over the Globe, but likewise with its variations through the different periods of time. Everywhere man is what he was capable of rendering himself, what he

had the will and the power to become. Were he contented with his condition, or were the means of his improvement not yet ripened in the ample field of time; he remained for ages what he was, and became nothing more. But if he employed the instruments God had given him for his use, his understanding, power, and all the opportunities that a favorable current conveyed to him; he raised himself higher with art, and improved himself with courage. If he did not this, his very indolence showed, that he was little sensible of his misfortune: for every lively feeling of injustice, accompanied by intelligence and strength, must become an emancipating power. The long submission to despotism, for instance, arose by no means from the overbearing might of the despots: the easy, confiding weakness of their subjects, and latterly their patient indolence, were its great and only supports. For it must be confessed, it is easier to bear with patience, than to redress ourselves with vigor; and hence so many nations have forborn to assert the right, that God has conferred on them in the divine gift of reason.

Still there is no doubt, generally speaking, that what has not yet appeared upon Earth, will at some future period appear: for no prescription is a bar to the rights of man, and the powers, that God has implanted in him, are ineradicable. We are astonished, to see how far the Greeks and Romans advanced in a few centuries, in their sphere of objects: for, though the aim of their exertions was not always the most pure, they proved, that they were capable of reaching it. Their image shines in history, and animates every one, who resembles them, to similar and better exertions, under the same and greater assistance of fate. In this view the whole history of nations is to us a school, for instructing us in the course, by which we are to reach the lovely goal of humanity and worth. So many celebrated nations of old attained an inferior aim: why should not we succeed in the pursuit of a purer and more noble object? They were men like us: their call to the best form of humanity was ours, according to the circumstances of the times, to our knowledge, and to our duties. What they could perform without a miracle, we can and ought to perform: the deity assists us only by means of our own industry, our own understanding, our own powers. . . .

*The Noblest Use of History.* . . . Human Reason pursues her course in the species in general: she invents, before she can apply; she discovers, though evil hands may long abuse her discoveries. Abuse will correct itself; and, through the unwearied zeal of ever-growing Reason, disorder will in time become order. By contending against passions, she strengthens and enlightens herself: from being oppressed in this place, she will fly to that, and extend the sphere of her sway over the Earth. There is nothing enthusiastical in the hope, that, wherever men dwell, at some future period will dwell men rational, just, and happy: happy, not through the means of their own reason alone, but of the common reason of their whole fraternal race.

I bend before this lofty sketch of the general wisdom of Nature with



regard to the whole of my fellow creatures the more willingly, as I perceive, that it is Nature's universal plan. The law that sustained the mundane system, and formed each crystal, each worm, each flake of snow, formed and sustained also the human species: it made its own nature the basis of its continuance, and progressive action, as long as men shall exist. All the works of God have their stability in themselves, and in their beautiful consistency: for they all repose, within their determinate limits, on the equilibrium of contending powers, by their intrinsic energy, which reduces these to order. Guided by this clue, I wander through the labyrinth of history, and every where perceive divine harmonious order: for what can anywhere occur, does occur; what can operate, operates. But reason and justice alone endure: madness and folly destroy the Earth and themselves.

Thus when I hear a Brutus at Philippi, with the dagger in his hand, looking up to the starry sky, say, according to the fabled story. "O Virtue, I believed thee something; but now I perceive, that thou art a dream!" I cannot discover the calm philosopher in the latter part of the complaint. Had he possessed true virtue, this, as well as his reason, would ever have found its own reward, and must have rewarded him even at that moment. But if his virtue were mere Roman patriotism, is it to be wondered, that the weaker yielded to the more strong, that the indolent sunk before the more alert? Thus the victory of Antony, with all its consequences, belonged to the order of things, and to the natural fate of Rome.

In like manner when among us the virtuous man so often complains, that his labours miscarry; that brutal force and oppression prevail upon Earth; and that mankind seem to be given merely as a prey to the passions, and to folly: let the genius of his understanding appear to him, and interrogate him friendly, whether his virtue be of the right kind, and connected with that intelligence, that activity, which alone deserve the name of virtue. Every labor, it must be confessed, does not succeed on all occasions; but do thy best, that it may succeed, and promote its time, its place, and that internal stability, in which real good alone subsists. Rude powers can be regulated only by reason: but they require an actual counterpoise, that is prudence, zeal, and the whole force of goodness, to reduce them to order, and maintain them in it with salutary control.

It is a beautiful dream of future life, that we shall there enjoy friendly intercourse with all the wise and good, who have ever acted for the benefit of mankind, and gone to the regions above with the sweet reward of accomplished labors: but history in a certain degree unlocks to us this arbour of pleasing conversation and intimacy with the intelligent and just of all ages. Here Plato stands before me: there I listen to the friendly interrogations of Socrates, and participate in his last fate. When Marcus Antoninus confers in secret with his own heart, he confers also with mine; and the poor Epictetus issues commands more powerful than those of a king. The afflicted Tully, the unfortunate Beothius, confidentially disclose to me the circumstances of their lives, their sorrows, and their consolations. How ample, yet how narrow, is the human heart! How individual, yet

how recurrent, are all its passions and desires, its faults and foibles, its hope and its enjoyment! The problem of humanity has been solved a thousand ways around me, yet every where the result of man's endeavors is the same: "the essence, the object, and the fate of our species, rest on understanding and justice." There is no nobler use of history than this: it unfolds to us as it were the counsels of Fate, and teaches us, insignificant as we are, to act according to God's eternal laws. By teaching us the faults and consequences of every species of irrationality, it assigns us our short and tranquil scene on that great theatre, where Reason and Goodness, contending indeed with wild powers, still, from their nature, create order, and hold on in the path of victory.

## CONDORCET (1743-1794)

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ANTOINE-NICOLAS DE CONDORCET was born in 1743 in Picardy. After a Jesuit education, he turned to the study of mathematics and science, and wrote his *Essai sur le calcul integral* at the age of twenty-two. During the next four years he published further works on mathematical and scientific subjects; at the same time he absorbed the new ideas on political economy of the Physiocrats, and formed friendships with men like Helvétius and Turgot. At twenty-six he was elected to the Académie des Sciences, becoming Secretary to the Academy in 1773. Nine years later he was elected to the Académie Française. He took an active part in the French Revolution, becoming president of the Legislative Assembly to which he was elected in 1791 and later acting as a member of a sub-committee of the Committee of Public Safety. He was not, however, a Jacobin and was eventually forced to go into hiding as a result of his protests against a new Jacobin Constitution adopted by the convention; it was then that he began working on his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. In 1794 he was arrested and imprisoned; the following day he was found dead in his cell, having, it is thought, taken poison.

Condorcet was a figure of his age, a man with considerable scientific knowledge and with a passionate concern for social and political reform. His numerous writings include not only treatises on science and philosophy but a quantity of pamphlets on such matters as education, slavery, religious persecution and electoral change. His *Esquisse* is the work of a thinker who interpreted history as a continuous movement towards ideals

which testify to the foresight as well as to the generosity of the mind that envisaged them. Condorcet conceived history not merely in terms of intellectual and artistic progress but also in terms of advance towards such goals as universal suffrage and education, freedom of expression and thought, legal equality and the redistribution of wealth. Thus the picture of human history that emerges from the sketch he outlines is one in which the events of the past are portrayed according to the perspective imposed by a clearly defined viewpoint. History is the record of events and developments to be understood and appraised in the light of the part they played in helping to promote the eventual realization in human society of certain conditions, conditions which not only ought to prevail but (it is confidently assumed) at some future date inevitably will prevail. What was the justification for such optimism? Condorcet believed that the key to true insight into the significance of historical change lay in the recognition that human affairs, like the phenomena of nature, were subject to universal discoverable laws. By means of a knowledge of these, acquired through attending to what has happened in the past, it is not only possible to make predictions and forecasts; it is also possible to apply to problems of political and social organization the methods that have proved so enormously successful elsewhere as a consequence of advances made in the natural sciences.

This was, of course, an idea that was to be developed and elaborated by the great social theorists of the nineteenth century—men like Saint-Simon, Comte and Marx. A sure grasp of the nature and operation of the laws governing historical development does more than make plain to us what lies before us; it puts in our hands the instruments for hastening this state of affairs by indicating the forces which stand in its way and will have to be overcome, as well as those by which its eventual realization will be accomplished. Condorcet himself never formulated a revolutionary programme in the Marxian sense, but the morals he drew from his study of human history have revolutionary implications. If "nature has set no limit to the perfection of human faculties," she has nevertheless not arranged things so that it is impossible for men to fall into error, whether as a result of their own idleness and credulity or as a result of the activities of those who have an interest in keeping them in a state of ignorance and superstitious belief. There is a "distinction" which is met with in all stages of civilization, by which the human race is separated into two parts—"the one destined to teach, the other made to believe; the one jealously hiding what it boasts of knowing, the other receiving with respect whatever is condescendingly revealed to it . . .".\* The destruction of error and of the forces that seek to perpetuate it is at once a necessary feature of the historical process and the means by which the perfectibility of man is rendered possible. In this connection it is worth noticing that Condorcet was highly critical of the extent to which previous historians had concen-

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\**Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, p. 17.

trated upon the political activities and plans of outstanding individuals or leaders; they failed to take into account the opinions, wants and habits of the mass of mankind, nor did they pay sufficient attention to the non-political aspects of social life and to the relations holding between these.

Condorcet accepted much of the dominant Enlightenment picture of human nature. Men were equipped by their sense organs, and by their natural powers of thought and calculation, for the unhindered pursuit of the truth. Further, they possessed certain natural rights recognizable by reason and belonging to them in virtue of their rationality. These assumptions, together with Condorcet's desire to see scientific procedures extended to solve the problems presented by practical politics, produced an interpretation of the historical process which is very different in general character and tone from the interpretations provided by Vico or Herder, despite specific points of resemblance—Herder, for example, also believed that history in some sense moved according to discoverable laws and spoke as if its progress was towards the extension of the ideas of reason and justice. But the reformist passion underlying Condorcet's view of history, which made him see the human past as the story of man's gradual emergence from barbarism and superstition rather than as the embodiment of cultural forms and achievements to be understood and respected in themselves, and which made him judge and appraise historical events in the light of their relevance to certain fixed ideals and aspirations, connects him, not with these men, but with his great compatriots, Voltaire and Turgot.

## The Progress of the Human Mind\*

*The Nature of Men.* Man is born with the ability to receive sensations; to perceive them and to distinguish between the various simple sensations of which they are composed; to remember, recognize and combine them; to compare these combinations; to apprehend what they have in common and the ways in which they differ; to attach signs to them all in order to recognize them more easily and to allow for the ready production of new combinations.

This faculty is developed in him through the action of external objects, that is to say, by the occurrence of certain composite sensations whose

\*The selections which follow are from the Introduction, the Ninth Stage and the Tenth Stage of Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, in the English translation by June Barraclough. They are reprinted with the kind permission of Messrs. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

constancy or coherence in change are independent of him; through communication with other beings like himself; and finally through various artificial methods which these first developinents have led him to invent.

Sensations are attended by pleasure or pain; and man for his part has the capacity to transform such momentary impressions into permanent feelings of an agreeable or disagreeable character, and then to experience these feelings when he either observes or recollects the pleasures and pains of other sentient beings.

Finally, as a consequence of this capacity and of his ability to form and combine ideas, there arise between him and his fellow-creatures ties of interest and duty, to which nature herself has wished to attach the most precious portion of our happiness and the most painful of our ills.

If one confines oneself to the study and observation of the general facts and laws about the development of these faculties, considering only what is common to all human beings, this science is called metaphysics. But if one studies this development as it manifests itself in the inhabitants of a certain area at a certain period of time and then traces it on from generation to generation, one has the picture of the progress of the human mind. This progress is subject to the same general laws that can be observed in the development of the faculties of the individual, and it is indeed no more than the sum of that development realized in a large number of individuals joined together in society. What happens at any particular moment is the result of what has happened at all previous moments, and itself has an influence on what will happen in the future.

So such a picture is historical, since it is a record of change and is based on the observation of human societies throughout the different stages of their development. It ought to reveal the order of this change and the influence that each moment exerts upon the subsequent moment, and so ought also to show, in the modifications that the human species has undergone, ceaselessly renewing itself through the immensity of the centuries, the path that it has followed, the steps that it has made towards truth or happiness.

Such observations upon what man has been and what he is today, will instruct us about the means we should employ to make certain and rapid the further progress that his nature allows him still to hope for.

Such is the aim of the work that I have undertaken, and its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us. This progress will doubtless vary in speed, but it will never be reversed as long as the earth occupies its present place in the system of the universe, and as long as the general laws of this system produce neither a general cataclysm nor such changes as will deprive the human race of its present faculties and its present resources. . . .

*The Past and the Future.* All peoples whose history is recorded fall somewhere between our present degree of civilization and that which we still see amongst savage tribes; if we survey in a single sweep the universal history of peoples we see them sometimes making fresh progress, sometimes plunging back into ignorance, sometimes surviving somewhere between these extremes or halted at a certain point, sometimes disappearing from the earth under the conqueror's heel, mixing with the victors or living on in slavery, or sometimes receiving knowledge from some more enlightened people in order to transmit it in their turn to other nations, and so welding an uninterrupted chain between the beginning of historical time and the century in which we live, between the first peoples known to us and the present nations of Europe.

So the picture that I have undertaken to sketch falls into three distinct parts.

In our first our information is based on the tales that travellers bring back to us about the state of the human race among the less civilized peoples, and we have to conjecture the stages by which man living in isolation or restricted to the kind of association necessary for survival, was able to make the first steps on a path whose destination is the use of a developed language. This is the most important distinction and indeed, apart from a few more extensive ideas of morality and the feeble beginnings of social order, the only one separating man from the animals who like him live in a regular and continuous society. We are therefore in this matter forced to rely upon theoretical observations about the development of our intellectual and moral faculties.

In order to carry the history of man up to the point where he practises certain arts, where knowledge of the sciences has already begun to enlighten him, where trade unites the nations and where, finally, alphabetical writing is invented, we can add to this first guide the history of the different societies which have been observed in all their intermediary stages, although none can be traced back far enough to enable us to bridge the gulf which separates these two great eras of the human race.

Here the picture begins to depend in large part on a succession of facts transmitted to us in history, but it is necessary to select them from the history of different peoples, to compare them and combine them in order to extract the hypothetical history of a single people and to compose the picture of its progress.

The history of man from the time when alphabetical writing was known in Greece to the condition of the human race at the present day in the most enlightened countries of Europe is linked by an uninterrupted chain of facts and observations; and so at this point the picture of the march and progress of the human mind becomes truly historical. Philosophy has nothing more to guess, no more hypothetical surmises to make; it is enough to assemble and order the facts and to show the useful truths that can be derived from their connections and from their totality.

When we have shown all this, there will remain one last picture for us

to sketch: that of our hopes, and of the progress reserved for future generations, which the constancy of the laws of nature seems to assure them. It will be necessary to indicate by what stages what must appear to us today a fantastic hope ought in time to become possible, and even likely; to show why, in spite of the transitory successes of prejudice and the support that it receives from the corruption of governments or peoples, truth alone will obtain a lasting victory; we shall demonstrate how nature has joined together indissolubly the progress of knowledge and that of liberty, virtue and respect for the natural rights of man; and how these, the only real goods that we possess, though so often separated that they have even been held to be incompatible, must on the contrary become inseparable from the moment when enlightenment has attained a certain level in a number of nations, and has penetrated throughout the whole mass of a great people whose language is universally known and whose commercial relations embrace the whole area of the globe. Once such a close accord had been established between all enlightened men, from then onwards all will be the friends of humanity, all will work together for its perfection and its happiness.

We shall reveal the origin and trace the history of those widespread errors which have somewhat retarded or suspended the progress of reason and which have, as often as forces of a political character, even caused man to fall back into ignorance.

The operations of the understanding that lead us into error or hold us there, from the subtle paralogism which can deceive even the most enlightened of men, to the dreams of a madman, belong no less than the methods of right reasoning or of discourse to the theory of the development of our individual faculties; on the same principle, the way in which general errors are insinuated amongst peoples and are propagated, transmitted and perpetuated is all part of the historical picture of the progress of the human mind. Like the truths that perfect and illuminate it, they are the necessary consequences of its activity and of the disproportion that for ever holds between what it knows, what it wishes to know and what it believes it needs to know.

It can even be observed that, according to the general laws of the development of our faculties, certain prejudices have necessarily come into being at each stage of our progress, but they have extended their seductions or their empire long beyond their due season, because men retain the prejudices of their childhood, their country and their age, long after they have discovered all the truths necessary to destroy them.

Finally, in all countries at all times there are different prejudices varying with the standard of education of the different classes of men and their professions. The prejudices of philosophers harm the progress of truth; those of the less enlightened classes retard the propagation of truths already known; those of certain eminent or powerful professions place obstacles in truth's way: here we see three enemies whom reason is obliged to combat without respite, and whom she vanquishes often only after a long and painful struggle. The history of these struggles, of the birth,

triumph and fall of prejudices will occupy a great part of this work and will be neither the least important nor the least useful section of it.

[If there is to be a science for predicting the progress of the human race, for directing and hastening it, the history of the progress already achieved must be its foundation.]\*

[Philosophy has had to proscribe in no uncertain terms that superstition which believes that rules of conduct can be found only in the history of past centuries, and truth only in the study of ancient opinions. But ought it not to condemn with equal vigour the prejudice that arrogantly rejects the lessons of experience? Without doubt it is only by meditation, which furnishes us with fruitful combinations of ideas, that we can arrive at any general truths in the science of man. But if the study of individual human beings is useful to the metaphysician and the moralist, why should the study of societies be any less useful to them and to the political philosopher? If it is useful to observe the various societies that exist side by side, and to study the relations between them, why should it not also be useful to observe them across the passage of time? Even if we suppose that these observations can be neglected in the search for speculative truths, ought they to be ignored when it is a question of applying these truths in practice and of deducing from science the art which should be its useful result? Do not our prejudices and the evils that proceed from them have their origins in the prejudices of our ancestors? Is not one of the most certain ways of undeceiving ourselves from the one and of guarding ourselves against the other, to study their origins and their effects?]

[Are we now at the stage when we have nothing further to fear, neither new errors nor the return of old ones; when no corrupting institution can any longer be devised by hypocrisy, and adopted by ignorance or enthusiasm; when no evil combination can any longer ruin a great nation? Would it then be useless to know how in the past nations have been deceived, corrupted or plunged into misery?]

[Everything tells us that we are now close upon one of the great revolutions of the human race. If we wish to learn what to expect from it and to procure a certain guide to lead us in the midst of its vicissitudes, what could be more suitable than to have some picture of the revolutions that have gone before it and prepared its way? The present state of enlightenment assures us that this revolution will have a favourable result, but is not this only on condition that we know how to employ our knowledge and resources to their fullest extent? And in order that the happiness that it promises may be less dearly bought, that it may be diffused more rapidly over a greater area, that it may be more complete in its effects, do we not need to study the history of the human spirit to discover what obstacles we still have to fear and what means are open to us of surmounting them?] . . .

*History and the Mass of the Human Race.* Up till now, the history of politics, like that of philosophy or of science, has been the history of only

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\*The extracts in square brackets cannot with certainty be attributed to Condorcet. In spite, however, of doubts concerning their authenticity it has seemed justifiable to include them here in view of their interest.



a few individuals: that which really constitutes the human race, the vast mass of families living for the most part on the fruits of their labour, has been forgotten, and even of those who follow public professions, and work not for themselves but for society, who are engaged in teaching, ruling, protecting or healing others, it is only the leaders who have held the eye of the historian.

In writing the history of individuals, it is enough to collect facts; but the history of a group of men must be supported by observations; and to select these observations and to fasten upon their essential features enlightenment is necessary, and, to use them to good effect, philosophy in the same measure.

Moreover, these observations relate to quite ordinary matters, which lie open to every eye, and which anyone who so desires can find out about by himself. Consequently almost all the observations that have been collected have been made by travellers or foreigners; for facts that are regarded as common-place in their own country, become for them objects of curiosity. But unfortunately travellers are nearly always inaccurate observers; they observe things too hastily, through the prejudices of their own country or of that in which they are travelling; they discuss them with those into whose company chance has thrown them, and what they are told is nearly always dictated by self interest, by the spirit of party, by patriotic pride, or merely by the mood of the moment.

Thus it is not only to the servility of historians, as has been said with justice about the official historians of monarchs, that we must attribute the scarcity of records that would allow us to follow this, the most important chapter in the history of man.

These records we can supplement, but only imperfectly, by a study of legal systems, of the practical principles of politics and public economy, and of religion and superstition in general. For there can be such a vast discrepancy between the law in writing and the law applied, between the principles of rulers and their practice as modified by the will of their subjects, between a social institution in the minds of those who conceive it and the same institution when its provisions are realized in practice, between the religion of books and the religion of the people, between the apparently universal acceptance of a superstition and the support which it can in fact command, that the actual effects may bear no relation whatever to their apparent and generally accepted causes as studied by the historian.

It is this most obscure and neglected chapter of the history of the human race, for which we can gather so little material from records, that must occupy the fore-ground of our picture; and whether we are concerned with a discovery, an important theory, a new legal system, or a political revolution, we shall endeavour to determine its consequences for the majority in each society. For it is there that one finds the true subject matter of philosophy, for all intermediate consequences may be ignored except in so far as they eventually influence the greater mass of the human race.

It is only when we come to this final link in the chain that our contem-

plation of historical events and the reflections that occur to us are of true utility. Only then can we appreciate men's true claims to fame, and can take real pleasure in the progress of their reason; only then can we truly judge the perfection of the human race. . . .

*The Future Progress of the Human Mind.* If man can, with almost complete assurance, predict phenomena when he knows their laws, and if, even when he does not, he can still, with great expectation of success, forecast the future on the basis of his experience of the past, why, then, should it be regarded as a fantastic undertaking to sketch, with some pretence to truth, the future destiny of man on the basis of his history? The sole foundation for belief in the natural sciences is this idea, that the general laws directing the phenomena of the universe, known or unknown, are necessary and constant. Why should this principle be any less true for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties of man than for the other operations of nature? Since beliefs founded on past experience of like conditions provide the only rule of conduct for the wisest of men, why should the philosopher be forbidden to base his conjectures on these same foundations, so long as he does not attribute to them a certainty superior to that warranted by the number, the constancy, and the accuracy of his observations?

Our hopes for the future condition of the human race can be subsumed under three important heads: the abolition of inequality between nations, the progress of equality within each nation, and the true perfection of mankind. Will all nations one day attain that state of civilization which the most enlightened, the freest and the least burdened by prejudices, such as the French and the Anglo-Americans, have attained already? Will the vast gulf that separates these peoples from the slavery of nations under the rule of monarchs, from the barbarism of African tribes, from the ignorance of savages, little by little disappear?

Is there on the face of the earth a nation whose inhabitants have been debarred by nature herself from the enjoyment of freedom and the exercise of reason?

Are those differences which have hitherto been seen in every civilized country in respect of the enlightenment, the resources, and the wealth enjoyed by the different classes into which it is divided, is that inequality between men which was aggravated or perhaps produced by the earliest progress of society, are these part of civilization itself, or are they due to the present imperfections of the social art? Will they necessarily decrease and ultimately make way for a real equality, the final end of the social art, in which even the effects of the natural differences between men will be mitigated and the only kind of inequality to persist will be that which is in the interests of all and which favours the progress of civilization, of education, and of industry, without entailing either poverty, humiliation, or dependence? In other words, will men approach a condition in which everyone will have the knowledge necessary to conduct himself in the ordinary affairs of life, according to the light of his own reason, to preserve his mind free from prejudice, to understand his rights and to exercise them

in accordance with his conscience and his creed; in which everyone will become able, through the development of his faculties, to find the means of providing for his needs; and in which at last misery and folly will be the exception, and no longer the habitual lot of a section of society?

Is the human race to better itself, either by discoveries in the sciences and the arts, and so in the means to individual welfare and general prosperity; or by progress in the principles of conduct or practical morality; or by a true perfection of the intellectual, moral, or physical faculties of man, an improvement which may result from a perfection either of the instruments used to heighten the intensity of these faculties and to direct their use or of the natural constitution of man?

In answering these three questions we shall find in the experience of the past, in the observation of the progress that the sciences and civilization have already made, in the analysis of the progress of the human mind and of the development of its faculties, the strongest reasons for believing that nature has set no limit to the realization of our hopes.

## HEGEL (1770-1831)

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GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL was born in 1770 at Stuttgart, the son of a minor fiscal official. Between 1788 and 1793 he studied at the theological seminary at the University of Tübingen, becoming acquainted during this period with the works of Rousseau and Kant; Kant's writings in particular made a profound impression upon him. After a period of tutoring at Bern and Frankfurt, he was professor at the University of Jena between 1801 and 1806. With the victory of Napoleon and the temporary dishandment of the university Hegel went to Bavaria, where he edited the *Bamberger Zeitung* (1807-8) and then became rector of the Latin school at Nuremberg. In 1811 he married, and five years later occupied a professorial chair at Heidelberg. Hegel succeeded Fichte as Professor of Philosophy at Berlin in 1818, a post which he held until the end of his life—he died of cholera in 1831. A description of Hegel's manner when lecturing has been left by one of his editors;\* he is described as sitting "crumpled up and with head hanging down. . . His constant hemming and coughing disturbed the flow

\*H. G. Hotho: quoted by C. J. Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York, 1953), p. lvi.

of speech, each sentence stood by itself and emerged after an effort, . . . disjointed and disorganized."

Since his death Hegel has been the object both of extravagant eulogy and of bitter denunciation and attack. It is, however, impossible to deny the range and depth of his influence on the development of nineteenth-century thought—both in philosophy and in social and political theory.

Through his various main works—*The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *The Science of Logic* (1812-16), *The Philosophy of Right and Law* (1821) and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (delivered in the last years of his life)—Hegel constructed an elaborate metaphysical system in the grand manner, apparently undisturbed by Kant's powerful objections towards undertaking projects of this kind. The principal notions upon which this system was built were the notion of reality as being (in a way that is difficult accurately to describe) intelligible in rational or "ideal" terms, and the notion of reality as a developing, dynamic process. Thus, from one point of view, Hegel thought that the underlying structure of the world could be understood by grasping the content of certain fundamental concepts or categories, these being related to one another in such a manner as to form a self-determining series or progression. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Hegel believed that the relations between these concepts were relations of logical necessity in the accepted sense. Instead, the connections conform to the pattern of the famous Hegelian "dialectic." Dialectical reasoning proceeds on the assumption that a concept may be said to generate its opposite or "contradictory," the concept and its opposite together giving rise to a further idea which represents what is essential to both. But this, in its turn, generates its opposite: thus the process of dialectical transition begins again. Since the phenomenal world is regarded as being interpretable as the expression of the "ideal" relationships which it is the concern of "logic" (as conceived by Hegel) to articulate, it follows that both "Nature" and "Spirit," matter and mind, must be treated as conforming to similarly dialectical laws.

Obscure though this doctrine may be, it is essential to take it into account when considering Hegel's theory of history. As the extracts which follow make clear, Hegel insists that human history represents a rational process, which exhibits empirically, and in distinct stages, the working out of the implications of a certain idea, the "Idea of freedom." Freedom is said to be the essence of "Spirit," and the philosophy of history is part of the philosophy of Spirit. Thus, from the start, the subject matter of history is sharply distinguished from the subject matter of the sciences—"natural" objects and organisms. History also presents itself in Hegel's thought as a progressive development towards the realization of a certain approved goal—a conception which connects his theory with the theories of the Enlightenment. But unlike, for example, Condorcet, he does not regard the establishment of this contention as a purely empirical matter, demonstrable by an appeal to the known facts of history and to the laws governing the development of the human mind. Kant's conception of a purposive principle working behind the empirical facts, Herder's emphasis upon the individual character

or genius of particular peoples or nations—these notions also find their place in Hegel's system. Further, although the end towards which human history was moving was held by Hegel to be the realization of "freedom," the sense of "freedom" he had in mind was not closely analogous to the sense in which the word was used by the philosophers of the Enlightenment; "Freedom," Hegel affirms, "is nothing but the recognition and adoption of such universal substantial objects as Right and Law, and the production of a reality which is in accordance with them—the State."

A group of ideas that was to prove highly influential emerged from all this. History develops in determinate phases, each phase being intimately connected with the preceding one. The central concept in terms of which historical development must be understood is the group-concept of the "nation": each nation has its own particular contribution to make to historical progress; and each nation must be understood in terms of the principle, or "idiosyncrasy of spirit," which governs and connects the different aspects of its life—religious, political, moral, legal, scientific and artistic. Again, the part played in history by particular persons is only partially explained by considering their immediate and conscious interests; reference has to be made to the powerful historical forces of which they are both the instruments and (to some degree) the interpreters. The actions of individuals must thus be judged within the historical context which "demands," or necessitates, their performance. Similar considerations apply to institutions and forms of government. Hence notions like the "needs of an age" assume a crucial importance in the understanding of historical and social phenomena: it is through their use that the inexorable movement of history can be exhibited, a movement which may override the claims of particular moral and political ideals, however sincerely held. Hegel suggests, indeed, that it is not only pointless, but also mistaken, to lament the frustration or ineffectiveness of such ideals in history; to do so displays a misunderstanding of the true character of the historical process, a failure to recognize that it is the embodiment of what he calls "the universal divine reason."

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## Philosophical History\*

*The World-Spirit and History.* It must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate—Universal History—belongs to the realm

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\*All selections in this chapter are from the Introduction of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree.

of *Spirit*. The term "*World*," includes both physical and psychical Nature. Physical Nature also plays its part in the *World's History*, and attention will have to be paid to the fundamental natural relations thus involved. But *Spirit*, and the course of its development, is our substantial object. Our task does not require us to contemplate Nature as a Rational System in itself—though in its own proper domain it proves itself such—but simply in its relation to *Spirit*. On the stage on which we are observing it—Universal History—*Spirit* displays itself in its most concrete reality. Notwithstanding this (or rather for the very purpose of comprehending the general principles which this, its form of *concrete reality*, embodies) we must premise some abstract characteristics of the *nature of Spirit*. Such an explanation, however, cannot be given here under any other form than that of bare assertion. The present is not the occasion for unfolding the idea of *Spirit* speculatively; for whatever has a place in an Introduction, must, as already observed, be taken as simply historical; something assumed as having been explained and proved elsewhere; or whose demonstration awaits the sequel of the Science of History itself.

We have therefore to mention here:

- (1) The abstract characteristics of the nature of *Spirit*.
- (2) What means *Spirit* uses in order to realize its Idea.
- (3) Lastly, we must consider the shape which the perfect embodiment of *Spirit* assumes—the State.

The nature of *Spirit* may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite—*Matter*. As the essence of *Matter* is Gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of *Spirit* is Freedom. All will readily assent to the doctrine that *Spirit*, among other properties, is also endowed with Freedom; but philosophy teaches that all the qualities of *Spirit* exist only through Freedom; that all are but means for attaining Freedom; that all seek and produce this and this alone. It is a result of speculative Philosophy, that Freedom is the sole truth of *Spirit*. . . .

The question of the *means* by which Freedom develops itself to a *World*, conducts us to the phenomenon of History itself. Although Freedom is, primarily, an undeveloped idea, the means it uses are external and phenomenal; presenting themselves in History to our sensuous vision. The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action—the efficient agents in this scene of activity. Among these may, perhaps, be found aims of a liberal or universal kind—benevolence it may be, or noble patriotism; but such virtues and general views are but insignificant as compared with the *World* and its doings. We may perhaps see the Ideal of Reason actualized in those who adopt such aims, and within the sphere of their influence; but they bear only a trifling proportion to the mass of the human race; and the extent of that influence is limited accordingly. Passions, private aims, and the satisfaction of selfish desires, are on the other hand, most effective springs of action. Their power lies in

the fact that they respect none of the limitations which justice and morality would impose on them; and that these natural impulses have a more direct influence over man than the artificial and tedious discipline that tends to order and self-restraint, law and morality. . . .

This vast congeries of volitions, interests and activities, constitute the instruments and means of the World-Spirit for attaining its object; bringing it to consciousness, and realizing it. And this aim is none other than finding itself—coming to itself—and contemplating itself in concrete actuality. But that those manifestations of vitality on the part of individuals and peoples, in which they seek and satisfy their own purposes, are, at the same time, the means and instruments of a higher and broader purpose of which they know nothing—which they realize unconsciously—might be made a matter of question; rather has been questioned, and in every variety of form negatived, decried and condemned as mere dreaming and "Philosophy." But on this point I announced my view at the very outset, and asserted our hypothesis—which, however, will appear in the sequel, in the form of a legitimate inference—and our belief, that Reason governs the world, and has consequently governed its history. In relation to this independently universal and substantial existence—all else is subordinate, subservient to it, and the means for its development. . . .

[After giving a general account of the way in which the World-Spirit works through history, Hegel discusses the particular role of those whom he describes as "world-historical individuals." He goes on to consider people who indulge in "subjective fault-finding," and who lament the fact that in history the ideals which have appeared to many to have universal validity and worth have "foundered on the rocks of hard reality."]

*World-Historical Individuals.* Caesar, in danger of losing a position, not perhaps at that time of superiority, yet at least of equality with the others who were at the head of the State, and of succumbing to those who were just on the point of becoming his enemies—belongs essentially to this category. These enemies—who were at the same time pursuing *their* personal aims—had the form of the constitution, and the power conferred by an appearance of justice, on their side. Caesar was contending for the maintenance of his position, honor, and safety; and, since the power of his opponents included the sovereignty over the provinces of the Roman Empire, his victory secured for him the conquest of that entire Empire; and he thus became—though leaving the form of the constitution—the Autocrat of the State. That which secured for him the execution of a design, which in the first instance was of negative import—the Autocracy of Rome—was, however, at the same time an independently necessary feature in the history of Rome and of the world. It was not, then, his private gain merely, but an unconscious impulse that occasioned the accomplishment of that

for which the time was ripe. Such are all great historical men—whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order; but from a concealed fount—one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence—from that inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface, which, impinging on the outer world as on a shell, bursts it in pieces, because it is another kernel than that which belonged to the shell in question. They are men, therefore, who appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only *their* interest, and *their* work.

Such individuals had no consciousness of the general Idea they were unfolding, while prosecuting those aims of theirs; on the contrary, they were practical, political men. But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time—*what was ripe for development*. This was the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it. World-historical men—the Heroes of an epoch—must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time. Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others. Whatever prudent designs and counsels they might have learned from others, would be the more limited and inconsistent features in their career; for it was they who best understood affairs; from whom *others* learned, and approved, or at least acquiesced in—their policy. For that Spirit which had taken this fresh step in history is the inmost soul of all individuals; but in a state of unconsciousness which the great men in question aroused. Their fellows, therefore, follow these soul-leaders; for they feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied. If we go on to cast a look at the fate of these World-Historical persons, whose vocation it was to be the agents of the World-Spirit—we shall find it to have been no happy one. They attained no calm enjoyment; their whole life was labor and trouble; their whole nature was inought else but their master-passion. When their object is attained they fall off like empty hulls from the kernel. They die early, like Alexander; they are murdered, like Caesar; transported to St. Helena, like Napoleon. This fearful consolation—that historical men have not enjoyed what is called happiness, and of which only private life (and this may be passed under very various external circumstances) is capable—this consolation those may draw from history, who stand in need of it; and it is craved by Envy—vexed at what is great and transcendent—striving, therefore, to depreciate it, and to find some flaw in it. Thus in modern times it has been demonstrated *ad nauseam* that princes are generally unhappy on their thrones; in consideration of



which the possession of a throne is tolerated, and men acquiesce in the fact that not themselves but the personages in question are its occupants. The Free Man, we may observe, is not envious, but gladly recognizes what is great and exalted, and rejoices that it exists.

It is in the light of those common elements which constitute the interest and therefore the passions of individuals, that these historical men are to be regarded. They are *great* men, because they willed and accomplished something great; not a mere fancy, a mere intention, but that which met the case and fell in with the needs of the age. This mode of considering them also excludes the so-called "psychological" view, which—serving the purpose of envy most effectually—contrives so to refer all actions to the heart—to bring them under such a subjective aspect—as that their authors appear to have done everything under the impulse of some passion, mean or grand—some *morbid craving*—and on account of these passions and cravings to have been not moral men. Alexander of Macedon partly subdued Greece, and then Asia; therefore he was possessed by a *morbid craving* for conquest. He is alleged to have acted from a craving for fame, for conquest; and the proof that these were the impelling motives is that he did that which resulted in fame. What pedagogue has not demonstrated of Alexander the Great—of Julius Caesar—that they were instigated by such passions, and were consequently immoral men?—whence the conclusion immediately follows that he, the pedagogue, is a better man than they, because he has not such passions; a proof of which lies in the fact that he does not conquer Asia—vanquish Darius and Persus—but while he enjoys life himself, lets others enjoy it too. These psychologists are particularly fond of contemplating those peculiarities of great historical figures which appertain to them as private persons. Man must eat and drink; he sustains relations to friends and acquaintances; he has passing impulses and ebullitions of temper. "No man is a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*," is a well-known proverb; I have added—and Goethe repeated it ten years later—"but not because the former is no hero, but because the latter is a valet." He takes off the hero's boots, assists him to bed, knows that he prefers champagne, etc. Historical personages waited upon in historical literature by such psychological valets, come poorly off; they are brought down by these their attendants to a level with—or rather a few degrees below the level of—the morality of such exquisite discerners of spirits. The Thersites of Homer who abuses the kings is a standing figure for all times. Blows—that is beating with a solid cudgel—he does not get in every age, as in the Homeric one; but his envy, his egotism, is the thorn which he has to carry in his flesh; and the undying worm that gnaws him is the tormenting consideration that his excellent views and vituperations remain absolutely without result in the world. But our satisfaction at the fate of Thersitism also, may have its sinister side.

A World-historical individual is not so unwise as to indulge a variety of wishes to divide his regards. He is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else. It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even

sacred interests, inconsiderately; conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower—crush to pieces many an object in its path.

The special interest of passion is thus inseparable from the active development of a general principle: for it is from the special and determinate and from its negation, that the Universal results. Particularity contends with its like, and some loss is involved in the issue. It is not the general idea that is implicated in opposition and combat, and that is exposed to danger. It remains in the background, untouched and uninjured. This may be called the *cunning of reason*—that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss. For it is *phenomenal* being that is so treated, and of this, part is of no value, part is positive and real. The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The Idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and of corruptibility, not from itself, but from the passions of individuals. . . .

In contemplating the fate which virtue, morality, even piety experience in history, we must not fall into the Litany of Lamentations, that the good and pious often—or for the most part—fare ill in the world, while the evil-disposed and wicked prosper. The term prosperity is used in a variety of meanings—riches, outward honor, and the like. But in speaking of something which in and for itself constitutes an aim of existence, that so-called well or ill-faring of these or those isolated individuals cannot be regarded as an essential element in the rational order of the universe. With more justice than happiness—or a fortunate environment for individuals—it is demanded of the grand aim of the world's existence, that it should foster, nay involve the execution and ratification of good, moral, righteous purposes. What makes men morally discontented (a discontent, by the bye, on which they somewhat pride themselves), is that they do not find the present adapted to the realization of aims which they hold to be right and just (more especially in modern times, ideals of political constitutions); they contrast unfavorably things as they *are*, with their idea of things as they *ought* to be. In this case it is not private interest nor passion that desires gratification, but Reason, Justice, Liberty; and equipped with this title, the demand in question assumes a lofty bearing, and readily adopts a position not merely of discontent, but of open revolt against the actual condition of the world. To estimate such a feeling and such views aright, the demands insisted upon, and the very dogmatic opinions asserted, must be examined. At no time so much as in our own, have such general principles and notions been advanced, or with greater assurance. If in days gone by, history seems to present itself as a struggle of passions; in our time—though displays of passion are not wanting—it exhibits partly a predominance of the struggle of notions assuming the authority of principles; partly that of passions and interests essentially subjective, but under the mask of such higher sanctions. The pretensions thus contended for as

legitimate in the name of that which has been stated as the ultimate aim of Reason, pass accordingly, for absolute aims—to the same extent as Religion, Morals, Ethics. Nothing, as before remarked, is now more common than the complaint that the *ideals* which imagination sets up are not realized—that these glorious dreams are destroyed by cold actuality. These Ideals—which in the voyage of life founder on the rocks of hard reality—may be in the first instance only subjective, and belong to the idiosyncrasy of the individual, imagining himself the highest and wisest. Such do not properly belong to this category. For the fancies which the individual in his isolation indulges, cannot be the model for universal reality; just as *universal law* is not designed for the units of the mass. These as such may, in fact, find their interests decidedly thrust into the background. But by the term "Ideal," we also understand the ideal of Reason, of the Good, of the True. Poets, as e.g. Schiller, have painted such ideals touchingly and with strong emotion, and with the deeply melancholy conviction that they could not be realized. In affirming, on the contrary, that the Universal Reason *does* realize itself, we have indeed nothing to do with the individual empirically regarded. That admits of degrees of better and worse, since here chance and speciality have received authority from the Idea to exercise their monstrous power. Much, therefore, in particular aspects of the grand phenomenon might be found fault with. This subjective fault-finding—which, however, only keeps in view the individual and its deficiency, without taking notice of Reason pervading the whole—is easy; and inasmuch as it asserts an excellent intention with regard to the good of the whole, and seems to result from a kindly heart, it feels authorized to give itself airs and assume great consequence. It is easier to discover a deficiency in individuals, in states, and in Providence, than to see their real import and value. For in this merely negative fault-finding a proud position is taken—one which overlooks the object, without having entered into it—without having comprehended its positive aspect. Age generally makes men more tolerant; youth is always discontented. The tolerance of age is the result of the ripeness of a judgment which, not merely as the result of indifference, is satisfied even with what is inferior; but, more deeply taught by the grave experience of life, has been led to perceive the substantial, solid worth of the object in question. The insight then to which—in contradistinction from those ideals—philosophy is to lead us, is, that the real world is as it ought to be—that the truly good—the universal divine reason—is not a mere abstraction, but a vital principle capable of realizing itself. This Good, this Reason, in its most concrete form, is God. God governs the world; the actual working of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World. This plan philosophy strives to comprehend; for only that which has been developed as the result of it, possesses *bona fide* reality. That which does not accord with it, is negative, worthless existence. Before the pure light of this divine Idea—which is no mere Ideal—the phantom of a world whose events are an incoherent concourse of fortuitous circumstances, utterly vanishes. Philos-

ophy wishes to discover the substantial purport, the real side of the divine idea, and to justify the so much despised Reality of things; for Reason is the comprehension of the Divine work. But as to what concerns the perversion, corruption, and ruin of religious, ethical, and moral purposes, and states of society generally, it must be affirmed, that in their *essence* these are infinite and eternal; but that the forms they assume may be of a limited order and consequently belong to the domain of mere nature, and be subject to the sway of chance. They are therefore perishable, and exposed to decay and corruption. . . .

[The third question to be discussed is the question of the nature of the end towards which history, conceived of as a rationally ordered process, is leading. The realization of this end is to be found in the State.]

*The State as the End of History.* The third point to be analyzed is, therefore—what is the object to be realized by these means; *i.e.* what is the form it assumes in the realm of reality. We have spoken of means; but in the carrying out of a subjective, limited aim, we have also to take into consideration the element of a *material*, either already present or which has to be procured. Thus the question would arise: What is the material in which the Ideal of Reason is wrought out? The primary answer would be—Personality itself—human desires—Subjectivity generally. In human knowledge and volition, as its material element, Reason attains positive existence. We have considered subjective volition where it has an object which is the truth and essence of a reality, *viz.*, where it constitutes a great world-historical passion. As a subjective will, occupied with limited passions, it is dependent, and can gratify its desires only within the limits of this dependence. But the subjective will has also a substantial life—a reality—in which it moves in the region of *essential* being, and has the essential itself as the object of its existence. This essential being is the union of the *subjective* with the *rational* Will: it is the moral Whole, the *State*, which is that form of reality in which the individual has and enjoys his freedom; but on the condition of his recognizing, believing in, and willing that which is common to the Whole. And this must not be understood as if the subjective will of the social unit attained its gratification and enjoyment through that common Will; as if this were a means provided for its benefit; as if the individual, in his relations to other individuals, thus limited his freedom, in order that this universal limitation—the mutual constraint of all—might secure a small space of liberty for each. Rather, we affirm, are Law, Morality, Government, and they alone, the positive reality and completion of Freedom. Freedom of a low and limited order, is mere caprice; which finds its exercise in the sphere of particular and limited desires. . . .

In the history of the World, only those peoples can come under our notice which form a state. For it must be understood that this latter is

the realization of Freedom, *i.e.* of the absolute final aim, and that it exists for its own sake. It must further be understood that all the worth which the human being possesses—all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State. For his spiritual reality consists in this, that his own essence—Reason—is objectively present to him, that is possesses objective immediate existence for him. Thus only is he fully conscious; thus only is he a partaker of morality—of a just and moral social and political life. For Truth is the Unity of the universal and subjective Will; and the Universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth. We have in it, therefore, the object of History in a more definite shape than before; that in which Freedom obtains objectivity, and lives in the enjoyment of this objectivity. For Law is the objectivity of Spirit; volition in its true form. Only that will which obeys law, is free; for it obeys itself—it is independent and so free. When the State or our country constitutes a community of existence; when the subjective will of man submits to laws—the contradiction between Liberty and Necessity vanishes. The Rational has necessary existence, as being the reality and substance of things, and we are free in recognizing it as law, and following it as the substance of our own being. The objective and the subjective will are then reconciled, and present one identical homogeneous whole. . . .

Summing up what has been said of the State, we find that we have been led to call its vital principle, as actuating the individuals who compose it—Morality. The State, its laws, its arrangements, constitute the rights of its members; its natural features, its mountains, air, and waters, are *their* country, their fatherland, their outward material property; the history of this State, *their* deeds; what their ancestors have produced, belongs to them and lives in their memory. All is their possession, just as they are possessed by it; for it constitutes their existence, their being.

Their imagination is occupied with the ideas thus presented, while the adoption of these laws, and of a fatherland so conditioned is the expression of their will. It is this matured totality which thus constitutes one Being, the spirit of one People. To it the individual members belong; each unit is the Son of his Nation, and at the same time—in as far as the State to which he belongs is undergoing development—the Son of his Age. None remains behind it, still less advances beyond it. This spiritual Being (the Spirit of his Time) is his; he is a representative of it; it is that in which he originated, and in which he lives. Among the Athenians the word Athens had a double import; suggesting primarily, a complex of political institutions, but no less, in the second place, that Goddess who represented the Spirit of the People and its unity. . . .

The remark next in order is, that each particular National genius is to be treated as only One Individual in the process of Universal History. For that history is the exhibition of the divine, absolute development of Spirit in its highest forms—that gradation by which it attains its truth and consciousness of itself. The forms which these grades of progress assume

are the characteristic "National Spirits" of History; the peculiar tenor of their moral life, of their Government, their Art, Religion, and Science. To realize these grades is the boundless impulse of the World-Spirit—the goal of its irresistible urging; for this division into organic members, and the full development of each, is its Idea.—Universal History is exclusively occupied with showing how Spirit comes to a recognition and adoption of the Truth: the dawn of knowledge appears; it begins to discover salient principles, and at last it arrives at full consciousness.

[In the final section of his Introduction Hegel implies that a distinction may be drawn between the study of certain natural phenomena and the study of history by comparing the different implications the concepts of *change* and *development* have in the two contexts. Whereas natural organisms develop and change in a blind, unconscious manner, this is not true in the case of historical phenomena, which are the expressions of self-conscious, self-determining, rational mind. In this way Hegel seems partly to be making the point that it is mistaken to try to carry over unchanged into history procedures and concepts that have proved successful in the natural sciences; the subject matter of history demands its own particular modes of representation and interpretation. It is these that Hegel is attempting to describe.]

*Change and Development.* The principle of *Development* involves also the existence of a latent germ of being—a capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself. This formal conception finds actual existence in Spirit; which has the History of the World for its theatre, its possession, and the sphere of its realization. It is not of such a nature as to be tossed to and fro amid the superficial play of accidents, but is rather the absolute arbiter of things; entirely unmoved by contingencies, which, indeed, it applies and manages for its own purposes. Development, however, is also a property of organized natural objects. Their existence presents itself, not as an exclusively dependent one, subjected to external change, but as one which expands itself in virtue of an internal unchangeable principle; a simple essence—whose existence, i.e., as a germ, is primarily simple—but which subsequently develops a variety of parts, that become involved with other objects, and consequently live through a continuous process of changes;—a process nevertheless, that results in the very contrary of change, and is even transformed into a *vis conservatrix* of the organic principle, and the form embodying it. Thus the organized *individuum* produces itself; it expands itself *actually* to what it was always *potentially*.—So Spirit is only that which it attains by its own efforts; it makes itself *actually* what it always was *potentially*.—That development (of *natural organisms*) takes place in a direct, unopposed, unhindered manner. Between the Idea and its realization—the essential constitution of the original germ and the conformity to it of the existence derived from it—no disturbing influence can intrude. But in relation to Spirit it is quite

otherwise. The realization of its Idea is mediated by consciousness and will; these very faculties are, in the first instance, sunk in their primary *merely* natural life; the first object and goal of their striving is the realization of their merely natural destiny—but which, since it is Spirit that animates it, is possessed of vast attractions and displays great power and (moral) richness. Thus Spirit is at war with itself; it has to overcome itself as its most formidable obstacle. That development which in the sphere of Nature is a peaceful growth, is in that of Spirit, a severe, a mighty conflict with itself. What Spirit really strives for is the realization of its Ideal being; but in doing so, it hides that goal from its own vision, and is proud and well satisfied in this alienation from it.

Its expansion, therefore, does not present the harmless tranquillity of mere growth, as does that of organic life, but a stern reluctant working against itself. It exhibits, moreover, not the mere formal conception of development, but the attainment of a definite result. The goal of attainment we determined at the outset: it is Spirit in its *Completeness*, in its essential nature, *i.e.*, Freedom. This is the fundamental object, and therefore also the leading principle of the development—that whereby it receives meaning and importance. . . .

Universal history—as already demonstrated—shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of Spirit, and of the consequent realization of that Freedom. This development implies a gradation—a series of increasingly adequate expressions or manifestations of Freedom, which result from its Idea. The logical, and—as still more prominent—the *dialectical* nature of the Idea in general, *viz.* that it is self-determined—that it assumes successive forms which it successively transcends; and by this very process of transcending its earlier stages, gains an affirmative, and, in fact, a richer and more concrete shape;—this necessity of its nature, and the necessary series of pure abstract forms which the Idea successively assumes—is exhibited in the department of *Logic*. Here we need adopt only one of its results, *viz.* that every step in the process, as differing from any other, has its determinate peculiar principle. In history this principle is idiosyncrasy of Spirit—peculiar National Genius. It is within the limitations of this idiosyncrasy that the spirit of the nation, concretely manifested, expresses every aspect of its consciousness and will—the whole cycle of its realization. Its religion, its polity, its ethics, its legislation, and even its science, art, and mechanical skill, all bear its stamp. These special peculiarities find their key in that common peculiarity—the particular principle that characterizes a people; as, on the other hand, in the facts which History presents in detail, that common characteristic principle may be detected. . . .

It is the concrete spirit of a people which we have distinctly to recognize, and since it is Spirit it can only be comprehended spiritually, that is, by thought. It is this alone which takes the lead in all the deeds and tendencies of that people, and which is occupied in realizing itself—in

satisfying its ideal and becoming self-conscious—for its great business is self-production. But for spirit, the highest attainment is self-knowledge; an advance not only to the *intuition*, but to the *thought*—the clear conception of itself. This it must and is also destined to accomplish; but the accomplishment is at the same time its dissolution, and the rise of another spirit, another world-historical people, another epoch of Universal History....

Spirit—consuming the envelope of its existence—does not merely pass into another envelope, nor rise rejuvenescent from the ashes of its previous form; it comes forth exalted, glorified, a purer spirit. It certainly makes war upon itself—consumes its own existence; but in this very destruction it works up that existence into a new form, and each successive phase becomes in its turn a material, working on which it exalts itself to a new grade.

If we consider Spirit in this aspect—regarding its changes not merely as rejuvenescent transitions, i.e., returns to the same form, but rather as manipulations of itself, by which it multiplies the material for future endeavors—we see it exerting itself in a variety of modes and directions; developing its powers and gratifying its desires in a variety which is inexhaustible; because every one of its creations, in which it has already found gratification, meets it anew as material, and is a new stimulus to plastic activity. The abstract conception of mere change gives place to the thought of Spirit manifesting, developing, and perfecting its powers in every direction which its manifold nature can follow. What powers it inherently possesses we learn from the variety of products and formations which it originates. In this pleasurable activity, it has to do only with itself. As involved with the conditions of mere nature—internal and external—it will indeed meet in these not only opposition and hindrance, but will often see its endeavors thereby fail; often sink under the complications in which it is entangled either by Nature or by itself. But in such case it perishes in fulfilling its own destiny and proper function, and even thus exhibits the spectacle of self-demonstration as spiritual activity.

The very essence of Spirit is activity; it realizes its potentiality—makes itself its own deed, its own work—and thus it becomes an object to itself; contemplates itself as an objective existence. Thus is it with the Spirit of a people: it is a Spirit having strictly defined characteristics, which erects itself into an objective world, that exists and persists in a particular religious form of worship, customs, constitution, and political laws—in the whole complex of its institutions—in the events and transactions that make up its history. That is its work—that is what this particular Nation is. Nations are what their deeds are. Every Englishman will say: We are the men who navigate the ocean, and have the commerce of the world; to whom the East Indies belong and their riches; who have a parliament, juries, etc.—The relation of the individual to that Spirit is that he appropriates to himself this substantial existence; that it becomes his character and capability, enabling him to have a definite place in the world—to be



something. For he finds the being of the people to which he belongs an already established, firm world—objectively present to him—with which he has to incorporate himself. In this its work, therefore—its world—the Spirit of the people enjoys its existence and finds its satisfaction.—A Nation is moral—virtuous—vigorous—while it is engaged in realizing its grand objects, and defends its work against external violence during the process of giving to its purposes an objective existence. The contradiction between its potential, subjective being—its inner aim and life—and its *actual* being is removed; it has attained full reality, has itself objectively present to it. But this having been attained, the activity displayed by the Spirit of the people in question is no longer needed; it has its desire. The Nation can still accomplish much in war and peace at home and abroad; but the living substantial soul itself may be said to have ceased its activity. The essential, supreme interest has consequently vanished from its life, for interest is present only where there is opposition....

We have already discussed the final aim of this progression. The principles of the successive phases of Spirit that animate the Nations in a necessitated gradation, are themselves only steps in the development of the one universal Spirit, which through them elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending *totality*.

While we are thus concerned exclusively with the Idea of Spirit, and in the History of the World regard everything as only its manifestation, we have, in traversing the past—however extensive its periods—only to do with what is *present*; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the *eternally present*. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential *now*. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps. These have indeed unfolded themselves in succession independently; but what Spirit is it has always been essentially; distinctions are only the development of this essential nature. The life of the ever present Spirit is a circle of progressive embodiments, which looked at in one aspect still exist beside each other, and only as looked at from another point of view appear as past. The grades which Spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of its present.

[In these extracts the Hegelian picture of historical development becomes plain. Nations grow and die, but in dying they at the same time promote the birth of something new. The fulfilment of a nation's particular principle or destiny is also (Hegel suggests in a rather macabre passage) the fruit that ultimately poisons it; but in thus annihilating itself, the nation brings into existence a fresh principle which manifests itself in the life of a new people. Through such "dialectical" movement human nature expresses itself in ever-changing forms of life and experience. Recognition of the essential variety mani-

fested by human development is as much a precondition of true historical understanding as recognition of the pattern that underlies it; Hegel's insistence upon this point may be contrasted with the belief in an unchanging human character, with fixed capacities and needs, which was implicit in so much seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought about man.]

## COMTE (1798-1857)

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AUGUSTE COMTE was born at Montpellier in 1798, the son of a Receiver-General of taxes, who was a Royalist and a Catholic. Trained as a mathematician, he went to the Ecole Polytechnique at Paris, and in 1817 became secretary to Saint-Simon, with whom he collaborated in various publications before they quarrelled shortly before Saint-Simon's death in 1825. Comte, who was already familiar with the writings of Montesquien and Condorcet, took quickly to Saint-Simon's ideas and rapidly absorbed his progressive view of history and his project for reorganizing society under a directing elite of scientists, artists and entrepreneurs. After a period of acute financial and psychological difficulty, when Comte made what he could by tutoring and sporadic journalism, the first volume of his main work, the *Cours de philosophie positive*, appeared in 1830; the sixth, and last, volume was not published until twelve years later. During this time Comte became involved in a lengthy correspondence with John Stuart Mill. Mill was greatly impressed by Comte's sociological and historical ideas and did much to make them known to the English public in the *Westminster Review*. He also did what he could to provide Comte with financial assistance in spite of the fact that the latter, who seems to have regarded such support as being the due of a great man, behaved with a singular lack of grace throughout the transaction. Comte's final book, the *Système de politique positive*, was published between 1852 and 1854 in four volumes, the last appearing three years before the death of the author.

Arrogant and dogmatic, and of an ungenerous cast of mind, Comte was not an attractive figure; and his huge books, heavy with repetitions, make rather tough reading today. But the ambitious sweep of his speculations produced a deep impression on nineteenth-century thought. Like Condorcet and Saint-Simon, Comte combined a progressive theory of history with a practical interest in problems of social and political organization;

and he upheld the ideal of applying scientific method to the study of society in an even more radical and uncompromising manner than they had done.

"Positivism," in the Comtean sense, restricts the field of knowledge to phenomena and relations amongst phenomena; we cannot know what lies beyond experience, and metaphysical claims to knowledge of unobservable real "essences" and "ultimate causes" are pretensions without warrant. The model of inquiry in all spheres must therefore be the procedures adopted by the particular empirical sciences, the sole purpose of which (in Comte's view) is to discover the rules governing the succession and coexistence of phenomena. The application of such methods to historical and social phenomena was the programme of what Comte called "social physics."

"Social physics," according to Comte, is the culmination of a historical movement, a movement consisting in the successive emergence of mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology as "positive sciences." Further, this general development of scientific knowledge is itself part of an evolutionary process. The famous "law of the three stages," which Comte regarded as a discovery of the first importance, describes the human mind as having passed through three main stages—"Theological," "Metaphysical" and "Scientific." Thus his project of interpreting social phenomena in a scientific manner was considered by him as being in a way justified by history itself: it was the inevitable outcome of a necessary historical law.

Comte has been criticized on many counts. It has been claimed that his characterization of scientific procedures suffers from various defects; that he did not, for example, fully appreciate the kind of role which theoretical concepts play in scientific explanation and prediction, and, again, that he was apt to employ terms like "law" in an imprecise and ambiguous sense. It has been argued, too, that his own final contribution to the study of society emerges as a curiously unscientific mixture of vague historical generalizations, misplaced biological analogies, and a quasi-mystical belief in the necessity of intellectual progress. Yet there can be no doubt that Comte put forward certain methodological suggestions which exerted a powerful influence over the minds of subsequent social theorists and historians: his view, for example, that human society is a subject for objective scientific investigation like anything else, to be understood in the light of discoverable laws correlating "observed facts;" and—connected with this—his demand that so-called "psychical" or mental phenomena should be interpreted in physiological terms. Also worth emphasizing are his collectivist approach, in which the social "whole" or group is treated as the primary datum of sociological theory; and his belief in the operation of fundamental social and intellectual forces as the real determinants of historical change, the effectiveness of political initiative and legislation being thought to depend upon the degree to which they are adapted to these. The similarities between some of Comte's doctrines and those of Marx are obvious; more startling—in view of their very different general standpoints—are the resemblances to certain of Hegel's ideas.

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## 1. The Positive Philosophy and the Study of Society\*

*The Three Stages of Human Progress.* In order to understand the true value and character of the Positive Philosophy, we must take a brief general view of the progressive course of the human mind, regarded as a whole; for no conception can be understood otherwise than through its history.

From the study of the development of human intelligence, in all directions, and through all times, the discovery arises of a great fundamental law, to which it is necessarily subject, and which has a solid foundation of proof, both in the facts of our organization and in our historical experience. The law is this:—that each of our leading conceptions—each branch of our knowledge—passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive. In other words, the human mind, by its nature, employs in its progress three methods of philosophizing, the character of which is essentially different, and even radically opposed: viz., the theological method, the metaphysical, and the positive. Hence arise three philosophies, or general systems of conceptions on the aggregate of phenomena, each of which excludes the others. The first is the necessary point of departure of the human understanding; and the third is its fixed and definite state. The second is merely a state of transition.

In the theological state, the human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and final causes (the origin and purpose) of all effects—in short, Absolute knowledge—supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings.

In the metaphysical state, which is only a modification of the first, the mind supposes, instead of supernatural beings, abstract forces, veritable entities (that is, personified abstractions) inherent in all beings, and capable of producing all phenomena. What is called the explanation of phenomena is, in this stage, a mere reference of each to its proper entity.

In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws—that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance. Reasoning and observation, duly combined, are the means of this knowledge. What is now understood when we speak of an explanation of facts is simply the establishment of a connection between single phenomena and some general facts, the number of which continually diminishes with the progress of science.

The Theological system arrived at the highest perfection of which it is capable when it substituted the providential action of a single Being for the varied operations of the numerous divinities which had been before

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\*The extracts in this selection are taken from Chapter I of Volume I and from Chapter III of Volume II of Harriet Martineau's translation of Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, which was published under the title *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*.

imagined. In the same way, in the last stage of the Metaphysical system, men substitute one great entity (Nature) as the cause of all phenomena, instead of the multitude of entities at first supposed. In the same way, again, the ultimate perfection of the Positive system would be (if such perfection could be hoped for) to represent all phenomena as particular aspects of a single general fact—such as Gravitation, for instance.

The importance of the working of this general law will be established hereafter. At present, it must suffice to point out some of the grounds of it.

There is no science which, having attained the positive stage, does not bear marks of having passed through the others. Some time since it was (whatever it might be) composed, as we can now perceive, of metaphysical abstractions; and, further back in the course of time, it took its form from theological conceptions. We shall have only too much occasion to see, as we proceed, that our most advanced sciences still bear very evident marks of the two earlier periods through which they have passed.

The progress of the individual mind is not only an illustration, but an indirect evidence of that of the general mind. The point of departure of the individual and of the race being the same, the phases of the mind of a man correspond to the epochs of the mind of the race. Now, each of us is aware, if he looks back upon his own history, that he was a theologian in his childhood, a metaphysician in his youth, and a natural philosopher in his manhood. All men who are up to their age can verify this for themselves. . . .

*The Character of the Positive Philosophy.* As we have seen, the first characteristic of the Positive Philosophy is that it regards all phenomena as subjected to invariable natural *Laws*. Our business is,—seeing how vain is any research into what are called *Causes*, whether first or final,—to pursue an accurate discovery of these *Laws*, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number. By speculating upon causes, we could solve no difficulty about origin and purpose. Our real business is to analyse accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relations of succession and resemblance. The best illustration of this is in the case of the doctrine of Gravitation. We say that the general phenomena of the universe are *explained* by it, because it connects under one head the whole immense variety of astronomical facts; exhibiting the constant tendency of atoms toward each other in direct proportion to their masses, and in inverse proportion to the squares of their distance; while the general fact itself is a mere extension of one which is perfectly familiar to us, and which we therefore say that we know;—the weight of bodies on the surface of the earth. As to what weight and attraction are, we have nothing to do with that, for it is not a matter of knowledge at all. Theologians and metaphysicians may imagine and refine about such questions; but positive philosophy rejects them. . . .

Before ascertaining the stage which the Positive Philosophy has reached, we must bear in mind that the different kinds of our knowledge have

passed through the three stages of progress at different rates, and have not therefore arrived at the same time. The rate of advance depends on the nature of the knowledge in question, so distinctly that, as we shall see hereafter, this consideration constitutes an accessory to the fundamental law of progress. Any kind of knowledge reaches the positive stage early in proportion to its generality, simplicity, and independence of other departments. Astronomical science, which is above all made up of facts that are general, simple, and independent of other sciences, arrived first; then terrestrial Physics; then Chemistry; and, at length, Physiology. . . .

*Social Physics.* In mentioning just now the four principal categories of phenomena,—astronomical, physical, chemical, and physiological,—there was an omission which will have been noticed. Nothing was said of Social phenomena. Though involved with the physiological, Social phenomena demand a distinct classification, both on account of their importance and of their difficulty. They are the most individual, the most complicated, the most dependent on all others; and therefore they must be the latest,—even if they had no special obstacle to encounter. This branch of science has not hitherto entered into the domain of Positive philosophy. Theological and metaphysical methods, exploded in other departments, are as yet exclusively applied, both in the way of inquiry and discussion, in all treatment of Social subjects, though the best minds are heartily weary of eternal disputes about divine right and the sovereignty of the people. This is the great, while it is evidently the only gap which has to be filled, to constitute, solid and entire, the Positive Philosophy. Now that the human mind has grasped celestial and terrestrial physics,—mechanical and chemical; organic physics, both vegetable and animal,—there remains one science, to fill up the series of sciences of observation,—Social physics. This is what men have now most need of: and this it is the principal aim of the present work to establish.

It would be absurd to pretend to offer this new science at once in a complete state. Others, less new, are in very unequal conditions of forwardness. But the same character of positivity which is impressed on all the others will be shown to belong to this. This once done, the philosophical system of the moderns will be in fact complete, as there will then be no phenomenon which does not naturally enter into some of the five great categories. All our fundamental conceptions having become homogeneous, the Positive state will be fully established. It can never again change its character, though it will be for ever in course of development by additions of new knowledge. Having acquired the character of universality which has hitherto been the only advantage resting with the two preceding systems, it will supersede them by its natural superiority, and leave to them only an historical existence. . . .

*Statical and Dynamical Laws.* The philosophical principle of the science being that social phenomena are subject to natural laws, admitting of rational prevision, we have to ascertain what is the precise subject, and what the peculiar character of those laws. The distinction between the

Statical and Dynamical conditions of the subject must be extended to social science. . . .

The distinction is not between two classes of facts, but between two aspects of a theory. It corresponds with the double conception of order and progress; for order consists (in a positive sense) in a permanent harmony among the conditions of social existence; and progress consists in social development; and the conditions in the one case, and the laws of movement in the other, constitute the statics and dynamics of social physics. . . .

The statical study of society consists in the investigation of the laws of action and reaction of the different parts of the social system—apart, for the occasion, from the fundamental movement which is always gradually modifying them. In this view, sociological prevision, founded upon the exact general knowledge of those relations, acts by judging by each other the various statical indications of each mode of social existence, in conformity with direct observation—just as is done daily in the case of anatomy. This view condemns the existing philosophical practice of contemplating social elements separately, as if they had an independent existence; and it leads us to regard them as in mutual relation, and forming a whole which compels us to treat them in combination. By this method, not only are we furnished with the only possible basis for the study of social movement, but we are put in possession of an important aid to direct observation; since many social elements which can not be investigated by immediate observation, may be estimated by their scientific relation to others already known. . . .

In a scientific view, this master-thought of universal social interconnection becomes the consequence and complement of a fundamental idea established, in our view of biology, as eminently proper to the study of living bodies. Not that this idea of interconnection is peculiar to that study: it is necessarily common to all phenomena; but amidst immense differences in intensity and variety, and therefore in philosophical importance. It is, in fact, true that wherever there is any system whatever, a certain interconnection must exist. The purely mechanical phenomena of astronomy offer the first suggestion of it; for the perturbations of one planet may sensibly affect another, through a modified gravitation. But the relation becomes closer and more marked in proportion to the complexity and diminished generality of the phenomena, and thus, it is in organic systems that we must look for the fullest mutual connection. Hitherto, it had been merely an accessory idea; but then it becomes the basis of positive conceptions; and it becomes more marked, the more compound are the organisms, and the more complex the phenomena in question,—the animal interconnection being more complete than the vegetable, and the human more than the brute; the nervous system being the chief seat of the biological interconnection. The idea must therefore be scientifically preponderant in social physics, even more than in biology, where it is so decisively recognised by the best order of students. . . .

Before we go on to the subject of social dynamics, I will just remark that the prominent interconnection we have been considering prescribes a procedure in organic studies different from that which suits inorganic. The metaphysicians announce as an aphorism that we should always, in every kind of study, proceed from the simple to the compound: whereas, it appears most rational to suppose that we should follow that or the reverse method, as may best suit our subject. There can be no absolute merit in the method enjoined, apart from its suitability. The rule should rather be (and there probably was a time when the two rules were one) that we must proceed from the more known to the less. Now, in the inorganic sciences, the elements are much better known to us than to the whole which they constitute: so that in that case we must proceed from the simple to the compound. But the reverse method is necessary in the study of Man and of Society; Man and Society as a whole being better known to us, and more accessible subjects of study, than the parts which constitute them. In exploring the universe, it is as a whole that it is inaccessible to us; whereas, in investigating Man or Society, our difficulty is in penetrating the details. . . .

The true general spirit of social dynamics then consists in conceiving of each of these consecutive social states as the necessary result of the preceding, and the indispensable mover of the following, according to the axiom of Leibnitz—*the present is big with the future*. In this view, the object of science is to discover the laws which govern this continuity, and the aggregate of which determines the course of human development. In short, social dynamics studies the laws of succession, while social statics inquires into those of coexistence; so that the use of the first is to furnish the true theory of progress to political practice, while the second performs the same service in regard to order; and this suitability to the needs of modern society is a strong confirmation of the philosophical character of such a combination.

If the existence of sociological laws has been established in the more difficult and uncertain case of the statical condition, we may assume that they will not be questioned in the dynamical province. In all times and places, the ordinary course of even our brief individual life has disclosed certain remarkable modifications which have occurred, in various ways, in the social state; and all the most ancient representations of human life bear unconscious and most interesting testimony to this, apart from all systematic estimate of the fact. . . .

The only question is about the constant subjection of these great dynamical phenomena to invariable natural laws, a proposition about which there is no question to any one who takes his stand on positive philosophy. It is easy however to establish, from any point of view, that the successive modifications of society have always taken place in a determinate order, the rational explanation of which is already possible in so many cases that we may confidently hope to recognise it ultimately in all the rest. . . .



## 2. Politics and Society\*

... The Scientific Doctrine of Politics considers the social state in which the human race has always been found by observers as the necessary effect of its organisation. It conceives the object of this social state as determined by the rank which man holds in the system of Nature, the result of facts which are not themselves susceptible of explanation. It perceives, in truth, that from this fundamental relation results the constant tendency of Man to act upon Nature, in order to modify it for his own advantage. It then considers the social order as aiming at a collective development of this natural tendency, so as to give the highest possible efficiency to this useful action. That being granted, it endeavors, by direct observations on the Collective Development of the race, to deduce from the fundamental laws of the human organisation the evolution it has undergone, and the intermediate states through which it has passed before reaching its definitive state. Guided by that series of observations, this doctrine regards the improvements reserved for each epoch as necessitated, without resorting to any hypothesis, by the stage of development which the human race had reached. Thus, in reference to each stage of Civilization, it views political combinations as merely intended to facilitate natural tendencies, when these have been sufficiently ascertained. . . .

The natural progress of Civilization, therefore, determines with entire certainty for each epoch the improvements of which the social state is susceptible, whether in parts or as a whole. Such improvements alone can be carried out, as in fact they are carried out by the combinations due to philosophers and statesmen, at times even in spite of these combinations.

All men who have exercised a real and durable action on the human race, whether in Temporal or Spiritual matters, have been guided and sustained by this fundamental truth, which the usual instinct of genius partially revealed to them, although never yet systematically demonstrated. They have, at every epoch, perceived what were the changes which the state of Civilization tended to bring about. These they enunciated, and proposed to their contemporaries doctrines and institutions in harmony with them. Whenever their conceptions were in accord with the real state of affairs, the changes so foreseen were speedily realised or consolidated. The new social forces, which had long been silently growing, suddenly appeared at their voice on the political scene with all the vigor of youth.

History having been, up to the present time, written and studied in a superficial spirit, such coincidences and striking results, in place of

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\*The essay from which this selection has been taken is entitled "Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society" and was written in 1822. It was one of several essays written by Comte between 1819 and 1828 and republished as an Appendix to Comte's *Positive Polity* (1854). An English translation of these writings by H. D. Hutton was published under the title *Early Essays on Social Philosophy* by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, with whose kind permission this selection is reprinted.

instructing men, as might be naturally supposed, have only astonished them. These facts, when misapprehended, even help to keep alive the Theological and Metaphysical belief in the indefinite power of legislators over Civilization. They maintain this superstitious idea in minds otherwise disposed to reject it, were it not apparently supported by observation. This untoward result arises from the circumstance that in these great events we see only men, never the forces which irresistibly compel them. Instead of recognising the preponderating influence of Civilization, the efforts of these far-seeing men are regarded as the true causes of the improvements effected, but which would equally have taken place, though somewhat more slowly, without their intervention. No one troubles himself with considering the enormous disproportion between the alleged cause and the results; a disproportion which would make the explanation much more incomprehensible than the fact itself. People look at the appearance and neglect the reality which is behind. In a word, according to Madame de Staël, we mistake the actors for the drama.

Such an error is exactly of the same nature as that of the Indians who attributed to Christopher Columbus the eclipse which he had foreseen.

Generally speaking, when the individual appears to exert a great influence, it is not due to his own forces, since these are extremely small. Forces external to him act in his favour, according to laws over which he has no control. His whole power lies in the intelligent apprehension of these laws through observation, his forecast of their effects, and the power which he thus obtains of subordinating them to the desired end, provided he employs them in accordance with their nature. The effect once produced, ignorance of natural laws leads the spectator, and sometimes the actor himself, to attribute to the power of man what is really only due to his foresight.

These general remarks apply to Political Action in the same way, and for the same reason, as to physical, chemical and physiological action. All political action is followed by a real and durable result, when it is exerted in the same direction as the force of Civilization, and aims at producing changes which the latter necessitates. On every other hypothesis, it exerts no influence, or a merely ephemeral one. . . .

In ascertaining what is to be the New System, it is necessary to put aside its advantages or disadvantages. The principal, indeed, the only question, should be: what is that Social System indicated by observation of the Past, which the progress of Civilization must establish? To occupy our thoughts much about the excellence of that system would be to confuse everything and even to miss our goal. We should confine ourselves to the simple conception that, inasmuch as the positive idea of goodness and that of harmony with the state of Civilization are identical, we are certain to obtain the best system now available, if we discover that which is most in harmony with the present state of Civilization. The idea of goodness having, as a positive conception, no separate existence, and becoming positive only when connected with the state of Civilization, we should apply

ourselves to the latter, as constituting the direct object of our researches, and alone capable of rendering Politics positive. The demonstration of the advantages of the New System and its superiority over the antecedent states should be regarded as of secondary value, and not allowed to exercise any influence in guiding our labors. . . .

## MILL (1806-1873)

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JOHN STUART MILL was born in 1806, the first son of James Mill. After a formidable early education at the hands of his Benthamite father, which included Greek, Latin, mathematics, logic and political economy and which deprived him of all contact with children of his own age, Mill went to India House in 1823, remaining there for the next thirty-five years until the company was extinguished. At about the same time he became a contributor to the radical *Westminster Review*, and took part in various discussions and debates with leading Utilitarians and Liberals. It was in 1826 that he experienced his famous revulsion against the aridity of the Benthamite outlook and philosophy described with such force in his *Autobiography*, a revulsion that was to lead him to reappraise the claims of the "Romantic" school represented by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and their followers, and to look at his father's bleak teachings in a far more critical light. The moral and political ideas that he was eventually to put forward in his *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty* are far removed in spirit and tone from those that had marked the hedonistic theories of Bentham and his followers. But Mill's intense interest in questions of political and social change remained unaffected, expressing itself both in the part he played in the movement for Parliamentary Reform and in his reaction to the ideas of Saint-Simon and Comte. Despite certain differences, it is Comte's views on history and social theory that stand behind the sections in the *System of Logic* (first published in 1843) from which the extracts included here have been chosen.

Mill's views on history and society can only be understood in the context of his ambivalent attitude towards the theories of the older Utilitarians. It was plain to him, for example, that both his father and Bentham had looked at social problems from a standpoint which caused them greatly to oversimplify the nature of these problems. They had regarded human

behavior as in principle predictable (and hence controllable) from the knowledge of simple natural laws to which it universally conforms: as J. S. Mill himself wrote, "Bentham's idea of the world was that of a collection of persons pursuing each his separate interest and pleasure." Such a view, he recognized, was one that failed to do justice to the basic differences in behavior and outlook of men who, living in dissimilar societies, are subject to varying "moral, educational, economical and other influences"; and he was not unaware of the force of Macaulay's criticisms of his father's *Essay on Government*—"certain propensities of human nature are assumed, and from these premises the whole science of politics is synthetically deduced." The Utilitarian interpretation of social phenomena was, in fact, one which was wholly unhistorical in approach, and it was Mill's growing awareness of the significance of historical studies, through his friendship with Carlyle and his reading of historians like Guizot and Michelet, that helped to bring about a radical shift in his attitude towards the methodological questions raised by the investigation of society and politics.

At the same time, it seemed to him impossible to accept the opinion that the only sound way of tackling such questions was by an appeal to the particular facts of historical and political experience and to these alone; for by themselves they would not provide us with an adequate understanding of social phenomena, being too complex and individual to allow of safe generalization. If Bentham had been too simple-minded in his view of the character of the laws of psychology, and of their application to human behavior, he had not been wrong in his insistence that knowledge of them was a prerequisite for constructing a theory of society; nor had he been wrong in stressing the connection between the formulation of such a theory and the serious discussion of practical projects for reform.

Mill's own social philosophy emerges as a curious compromise. Social development can only be understood historically; it proceeds through different stages of civilization and cultural advance. The determination of the character of these stages and of their component elements is an empirical matter: nevertheless (and here Mill seems to have been influenced by his conception of the role played by the laws of mechanics in the physical sciences) such phenomena cannot be finally understood and explained without connecting them with the basic laws of individual human psychology. The "empirical" laws according to which, for example, different stages of society succeed one another are thus treated as being derivative from more fundamental ones which concern "the principles of human nature," although knowledge of the latter is not by itself sufficient to enable us to infer the occurrence and course of actual social developments.

In some respects, this is not an uninteresting or unimportant idea: it might be taken, for example, as a methodological principle of historical research which bids us refuse to regard as ultimate or irreducible large-scale social changes, and recommends that they should be exhibited as far as possible as the consequences of particular human motives, intentions

and aims.<sup>†</sup> In the context of Mill's discussion, however, it appears to imply something considerably more ambitious than this; nor is Mill any more successful than Comte was in demonstrating exactly how the application of his ideas to the study of history and society would result in the establishment of a branch of inquiry which could appropriately be described as "scientific."

Mill was aware that attempts to treat the subject matter of the human studies scientifically were liable to run into the objection that they implied a denial of "free will": and he himself oscillates at different times between claiming that the laws of human motivation are as strict and invariable "as those which exist in the world of mere matter" and putting forward a more flexible view according to which men have "to some extent" the power of forming their own characters and hence of altering their dispositions to react in particular ways to external and internal stimuli. Here, however, he is principally concerned to show that acceptance of the thesis that human behavior is subject to law does not conflict with ordinary notions of freedom of choice in some of the ways in which it is commonly supposed to do, and that the belief that it does rests upon confusions of various kinds. Mill also argues that the thesis in question does not require us to believe that the actions of individuals have little or no influence in determining the course of historical developments.

## Elucidations of the Science of History\*

*The General Science of Society and Special Sociological Inquiries.* There are two kinds of sociological inquiry. In the first kind, the question proposed is, what effect will follow from a given cause, a certain general condition of social circumstances being presupposed. As, for example, what would be the effect of imposing or of repealing corn laws, of abolishing monarchy or introducing universal suffrage, in the present

<sup>†</sup>This was not, incidentally, an idea that would have greatly appealed to Comte: he would have been critical of the individualistic implications of such a theory. An interesting discussion of Mill's views is to be found in K. R. Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies*, ch. 14. Popper, while approving of Mill's anti-collectivism, criticizes his "psychologism" and emphasises the part that "reference to our social environment, to social institutions and their working" inevitably plays in the explanation of human action.

\* This selection comprises the major portions of Chapter X and the whole of Chapter XI of Book VI of *A System of Logic* (8th edition, 1872).

condition of society and civilization in any European country, or under any other given supposition with regard to the circumstances of society in general, without reference to the changes which might take place, or which may already be in progress, in those circumstances. But there is also a second inquiry, namely, what are the laws which determine those general circumstances themselves. In this last the question is, not what will be the effect of a given cause in a certain state of society, but what are the causes which produce, and the phenomena which characterize, states of society generally. In the solution of this question consists the general Science of Society; by which the conclusions of the other and more special kind of inquiry must be limited and controlled.

What Is a "State of Society"? In order to conceive correctly the scope of this general science, and distinguish it from the subordinate departments of sociological speculation, it is necessary to fix the ideas attached to the phrase, "A State of Society." What is called a state of society, is the simultaneous state of all the greater social facts or phenomena. Such are: the degree of knowledge, and of intellectual and moral culture, existing in the community, and in every class of it; the state of industry, of wealth and its distribution; the habitual occupations of the community; their division into classes, and the relations of those classes to one another; the common beliefs which they entertain on all the subjects most important to mankind, and the degree of assurance with which those beliefs are held; their tastes, and the character and degree of their aesthetic development; their form of government, and the more important of their laws and customs. The condition of all these things, and of many more which will readily suggest themselves, constitute the state of society, or the state of civilization at any given time.

When states of society, and the causes which produce them, are spoken of as a subject of science, it is implied that there exists a natural correlation among these different elements; that not every variety of combination of these general social facts is possible, but only certain combinations; that, in short, there exist Uniformities of Co-existence between the states of the various social phenomena. And such is the truth; as is indeed a necessary consequence of the influence exercised by every one of those phenomena over every other. It is a fact implied in the *consensus* of the various parts of the social body.

States of society are like different constitutions or different ages in the physical frame; they are conditions not of one or a few organs or functions, but of the whole organism. Accordingly, the information which we possess respecting past ages, and respecting the various states of society now existing in different regions of the earth, does, when duly analyzed, exhibit uniformities. It is found that when one of the features of society is in a particular state, a state of many other features, more or less precisely determinate, always or usually co-exists with it.

But the uniformities of co-existence obtaining among phenomena which are effects of causes, must (as we have so often observed) be corollaries

from the laws of causation by which these phenomena are really determined. The mutual correlation between the different elements of each state of society, is, therefore, a derivative law, resulting from the laws which regulate the succession between one state of society and another; for the proximate cause of every state of society is the state of society immediately preceding it. The fundamental problem, therefore, of the social science, is to find the laws according to which any state of society produces the state which succeeds it and takes its place. This opens the great and vexed question of the progressiveness of man and society; an idea involved in every just conception of social phenomena as the subject of a science.

*The Progressiveness of Men and Society.* It is one of the characters, not absolutely peculiar to the sciences of human nature and society, but belonging to them in a peculiar degree, to be conversant with a subject-matter whose properties are changeable. I do not mean changeable from day to day, but from age to age; so that not only the qualities of individuals vary, but those of the majority are not the same in one age as in another.

The principal cause of this peculiarity is the extensive and constant reaction of the effects upon their causes. The circumstances in which mankind are placed, operating according to their own laws and to the laws of human nature, form the characters of human beings; but the human beings, in their turn, mould and shape the circumstances for themselves and for those who come after them. From this reciprocal action there must necessarily result either a cycle or a progress. In astronomy also, every fact is at once effect and cause; the successive positions of the various heavenly bodies produce changes both in the direction and in the intensity of the forces by which those positions are determined. But in the case of the solar system, these mutual actions bring around again, after a certain number of changes, the former state of circumstances; which, of course, leads to the perpetual recurrence of the same series in an unvarying order. Those bodies, in short, revolve in orbits; but there are (or, conformably to the laws of astronomy, there might be) others which, instead of an orbit, describe a trajectory—a course not returning into itself. One or other of these must be the type to which human affairs must conform.

One of the thinkers who earliest conceived the succession of historical events as subject to fixed laws, and endeavored to discover these laws by an analytical survey of history, Vico, the celebrated author of the *Scienza Nuova*, adopted the former of these opinions. He conceived the phenomena of human society as revolving in an orbit; as going through periodically the same series of changes. Though there were not wanting circumstances tending to give some plausibility to this view, it would not bear a close scrutiny: and those who have succeeded Vico in this kind of speculations have universally adopted the idea of a trajectory or progress, in lieu of an orbit or cycle.

The words Progress and Progressiveness are not here to be understood as synonymous with improvement and tendency to improvement. It is conceivable that the laws of human nature might determine, and even

necessitate, a certain series of changes in man and society, which might not in every case, or which might not on the whole, be improvements. It is my belief, indeed, that the general tendency is, and will continue to be, saving occasional and temporary exceptions, one of improvement; a tendency toward a better and happier state. This, however, is not a question of the method of the social science, but a theorem of the science itself. For our purpose it is sufficient that there is a progressive change both in the character of the human race and in their outward circumstances, so far as moulded by themselves; that in each successive age the principal phenomena of society are different from what they were in the age preceding, and still more different from any previous age: the periods which most distinctly mark these successive changes being intervals of one generation, during which a new set of human beings have been educated, have grown up from childhood, and taken possession of society.

The progressiveness of the human race is the foundation on which a method of philosophizing in the social science has been of late years erected, far superior to either of the two modes which had previously been prevalent, the chemical or experimental, and the geometrical modes. This method, which is now generally adopted by the most advanced thinkers on the Continent, consists in attempting, by a study and analysis of the general facts of history, to discover (what these philosophers term) the law of progress: which law, once ascertained, must according to them enable us to predict future events, just as after a few terms of an infinite series in algebra we are able to detect the principle of regularity in their formation, and to predict the rest of the series to any number of terms we please. The principal aim of historical speculation in France, of late years, has been to ascertain this law. But while I gladly acknowledge the great services which have been rendered to historical knowledge by this school, I cannot but deem them to be mostly chargeable with a fundamental misconception of the true method of social philosophy. The misconception consists in supposing that the order of succession which we may be able to trace among the different states of society and civilization which history presents to us, even if that order were more rigidly uniform than it has yet been proved to be, could ever amount to a law of nature. It can only be an empirical law. The succession of states of the human mind and of human society can not have an independent law of its own; it must depend on the psychological and ethological laws which govern the action of circumstances on men and of men on circumstances. It is conceivable that those laws might be such, and the general circumstances of the human race such, as to determine the successive transformations of man and society to one given and unvarying order. But even if the case were so, it cannot be the ultimate aim of science to discover an empirical law. Until that law could be connected with the psychological and ethological laws on which it must depend, and, by the consilience of deduction *a priori* with historical evidence, could be converted from an empirical law into a scientific one, it could not be relied on for the prediction of future events,



beyond, at most, strictly adjacent cases. M. Comte alone, among the new historical school, has seen the necessity of thus connecting all our generalizations from history with the laws of human nature.

*The Laws of the Succession of States of Society.* But, while it is an imperative rule never to introduce any generalization from history into the social science unless sufficient grounds can be pointed out for it in human nature, I do not think any one will contend that it would have been possible, setting out from the principles of human nature and from the general circumstances of the position of our species, to determine *a priori* the order in which human development must take place, and to predict, consequently, the general facts of history up to the present time. After the first few terms of the series, the influence exercised over each generation by the generations which preceded it, becomes (as is well observed by the writer last referred to) more and more preponderant over all other influences; until at length what we now are and do, is in a very small degree the result of the universal circumstances of the human race, or even of our own circumstances acting through the original qualities of our species, but mainly of the qualities produced in us by the whole previous history of humanity. So long a series of actions and reactions between Circumstances and Man, each successive term being composed of an ever greater number and variety of parts, could not possibly be computed by human faculties from the elementary laws which produce it. The mere length of the series would be a sufficient obstacle, since a slight error in any one of the terms would augment in rapid progression at every subsequent step.

If, therefore, the series of the effects themselves did not, when examined as a whole, manifest any regularity, we should in vain attempt to construct a general science of society. We must in that case have contented ourselves with that subordinate order of sociological speculation formerly noticed, namely, with endeavoring to ascertain what would be the effect of the introduction of any new cause, in a state of society supposed to be fixed; a knowledge sufficient for the more common exigencies of daily political practice, but liable to fail in all cases in which the progressive movement of society is one of the influencing elements; and therefore more precarious in proportion as the case is more important. But since both the natural varieties of mankind, and the original diversities of local circumstances, are much less considerable than the points of agreement, there will naturally be a certain degree of uniformity in the progressive development of the species and of its works. And this uniformity tends to become greater, not less, as society advances; since the evolution of each people, which is at first determined exclusively by the nature and circumstances of that people, is gradually brought under the influence (which becomes stronger as civilization advances) of the other nations of the earth, and of the circumstances by which they have been influenced. History accordingly does, when judiciously examined, afford Empirical Laws of Society. And the problem of general sociology is to ascertain these, and

connect them with the laws of human nature, by deductions showing that such were the derivative laws naturally to be expected as the consequences of those ultimate ones.

It is, indeed, hardly ever possible, even after history has suggested the derivative law, to demonstrate *a priori* that such was the only order of succession or of co-existence in which the effects could, consistently with the laws of human nature, have been produced. We can at most make out that there were strong *a priori* reasons for expecting it, and that no other order of succession or co-existence would have been so likely to result from the nature of man and the general circumstances of his position. Often we can not do even this; we can not even show that what did take place was probable *a priori*, but only that it was possible. This, however—which, in the Inverse Deductive Method that we are now characterizing, is a real process of verification—is as indispensable, as verification by specific experience has been shown to be, where the conclusion is originally obtained by the direct way of deduction. The empirical laws must be the result of but a few instances, since few nations have ever attained at all, and still fewer by their own independent development, a high stage of social progress. If, therefore, even one or two of these few instances be insufficiently known, or imperfectly analyzed into their elements, and therefore not adequately compared with other instances, nothing is more probable than that a wrong empirical law will emerge instead of the right one. Accordingly, the most erroneous generalizations are continually made from the course of history; not only in this country, where history can not yet be said to be at all cultivated as a science, but in other countries where it is so cultivated, and by persons well versed in it. The only check or corrective is, constant verification by psychological and ethological\* laws. We may add to this, that no one but a person competently skilled in those laws is capable of preparing the materials for historical generalization, by analyzing the facts of history, or even by observing the social phenomena of his own time. No other will be aware of the comparative importance of different facts, nor consequently know what facts to look for, or to observe; still less will he be capable of estimating the evidence of facts which, as is the case with most, cannot be ascertained by direct observation or learned from testimony, but must be inferred from marks.

*Social Statics and Social Dynamics.* The Empirical Laws of Society are of two kinds; some are uniformities of co-existence, some of succession. According as the science is occupied in ascertaining and verifying the former sort of uniformities or the latter, M. Comte gives it the title of Social Statics, or of Social Dynamics; conformably to the distinction in mechanics between the conditions of equilibrium and those of movement; or in biology, between the laws of organization and those of life. The first branch of the science ascertains the conditions of stability in the social union;

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\*By "ethological laws," Mill meant "laws of the formation of character," these being "derivative from" the general laws of psychology. (Ed.)

the second, the laws of progress. Social Dynamics is the theory of Society considered in a state of progressive movement; while Social Statics is the theory of the *consensus* already spoken of as existing among the different parts of the social organism; in other words, the theory of the mutual actions and reactions of contemporaneous social phenomena. . . .

As already remarked, one of the main results of the science of social statics would be to ascertain the requisites of stable political union. There are some circumstances which, being found in all societies without exception, and in the greatest degree where the social union is most complete, may be considered (when psychological and ethological laws confirm the indication) as conditions of the existence of the complex phenomena called a State. For example, no numerous society has ever been held together without laws, or usages equivalent to them; without tribunals, and an organized force of some sort to execute their decisions. There have always been public authorities whom, with more or less strictness and in cases more or less accurately defined, the rest of the community obeyed, or according to general opinion were bound to obey. By following out this course of inquiry we shall find a number of requisites, which have been present in every society that has maintained a collective existence, and on the cessation of which it has either merged in some other society, or reconstructed itself on some new basis, in which the conditions were conformed to. Although these results, obtained by comparing different forms and states of society, amount in themselves only to empirical laws; some of them, when once suggested, are found to follow with so much probability from general laws of human nature, that the consilience of the two processes raises the evidence to proof, and the generalizations to the rank of scientific truths. . . .

While the derivative laws of social statics are ascertained by analyzing different states of society, and comparing them with one another, without regard to the order of their succession, the consideration of the successive order is, on the contrary, predominant in the study of social dynamics, of which the aim is to observe and explain the sequences of social conditions. This branch of the social science would be as complete as it can be made, if every one of the leading general circumstances of each generation were traced to its causes in the generation immediately preceding. But the *consensus* is so complete (especially in modern history) that, in the filiation of one generation and another, it is the whole which produces the whole, rather than any part a part. Little progress, therefore, can be made in establishing the filiation, directly from laws of human nature, without having first ascertained the immediate or derivative laws according to which social states generate one another as society advances; the *axiomata media* of General Sociology.

The empirical laws which are most readily obtained by generalization from history do not amount to this. They are not the "middle principles" themselves, but only evidence toward the establishment of such principles. They consist of certain general tendencies which may be perceived in

society; a progressive increase of some social elements, and diminution of others, or a gradual change in the general character of certain elements. It is easily seen, for instance, that as society advances, mental tend more and more to prevail over bodily qualities, and masses over individuals; that the occupation of all that portion of mankind who are not under external restraint is at first chiefly military, but society becomes progressively more and more engrossed with productive pursuits, and the military spirit gradually gives way to the industrial; to which many similar truths might be added. And with generalizations of this description, ordinary inquirers, even of the historical school now predominant on the Continent, are satisfied. But these and all such results are still at too great a distance from the elementary laws of human nature on which they depend—too many links intervene, and the concurrence of causes at each link is far too complicated—to enable these propositions to be presented as direct corollaries from those elementary principles. They have, therefore, in the minds of most inquirers, remained in the state of empirical laws, applicable only within the bounds of actual observation; without any means of determining their real limits, and of judging whether the changes which have hitherto been in progress are destined to continue indefinitely, or to terminate, or even to be reversed.

*Outlines of the Historical Method.* In order to obtain better empirical laws, we must not rest satisfied with noting the progressive changes which manifest themselves in the separate elements of society, and in which nothing is indicated but the relation of fragments of the effect to corresponding fragments of the cause. It is necessary to combine the statical view of social phenomena with the dynamical, considering not only the progressive changes of the different elements, but the contemporaneous condition of each; and thus obtain empirically the law of correspondence not only between the simultaneous states, but between the simultaneous changes, of those elements. This law of correspondence it is, which, duly verified *a priori*, would become the real scientific derivative law of the development of humanity and human affairs.

In the difficult process of observation and comparison which is here required, it would evidently be a great assistance if it should happen to be the fact, that some one element in the complex existence of social man is pre-eminent over all others as the prime agent of the social movement. For we could then take the progress of that one element as the central chain, to each successive link of which the corresponding links of all the other progressions being appended, the succession of the facts would by this alone be presented in a kind of spontaneous order, far more nearly approaching to the real order of their filiation than could be obtained by any other merely empirical process.

Now, the evidence of history and that of human nature combine, by a striking instance of consilience, to show that there really is one social element which is thus predominant, and almost paramount, among the agents of the social progression. This is, the state of the speculative facul-

ties of mankind; including the nature of the beliefs which by any means they have arrived at concerning themselves and the world by which they are surrounded.

It would be a great error, and one very little likely to be committed, to assert that speculation, intellectual activity, the pursuit of truth, is among the more powerful propensities of human nature, or holds a predominating place in the lives of any, save decidedly exceptional, individuals. But, notwithstanding the relative weakness of this principle among other sociological agents, its influence is the main determining cause of the social progress; all the other dispositions of our nature which contribute to that progress being dependent on it for the means of accomplishing their share of the work. Thus (to take the most obvious case first), the impelling force to most of the improvements effected in the arts of life, is the desire of increased material comfort; but as we can only act upon external objects in proportion to our knowledge of them, the state of knowledge at any time is the limit of the industrial improvements possible at that time; and the progress of industry must follow, and depend on, the progress of knowledge. The same thing may be shown to be true, though it is not quite so obvious, of the progress of the fine arts. Further, as the strongest propensities of uncultivated or half-cultivated human nature (being the purely selfish ones, and those of a sympathetic character which partake most of the nature of selfishness) evidently tend in themselves to disunite mankind, not to unite them—to make them rivals, not confederates; social existence is only possible by a disciplining of those more powerful propensities, which consists in subordinating them to a common system of opinions. The degree of this subordination is the measure of the completeness of the social union, and the nature of the common opinions determines its kind. But in order that mankind should conform their actions to any set of opinions, these opinions must exist, must be believed by them. And thus, the state of the speculative faculties, the character of the propositions assented to by the intellect, essentially determines the moral and political state of the community, as we have already seen that it determines the physical.

These conclusions, deduced from the laws of human nature, are in entire accordance with the general facts of history. Every considerable change historically known to us in the condition of any portion of mankind, when not brought about by external force, has been preceded by a change, of proportional extent, in the state of their knowledge, or in their prevalent beliefs. As between any given state of speculation, and the correlative state of every thing else, it was almost always the former which first showed itself; though the effects, no doubt, reacted potently upon the cause. Every considerable advance in material civilization has been preceded by an advance in knowledge: and when any great social change has come to pass, either in the way of gradual development or of sudden conflict, it has had for its precursor a great change in the opinions and modes of thinking of society. Polytheism, Judaism, Christianity, Protestantism,

the critical philosophy of modern Europe, and its positive science—each of these has been a primary agent in making society what it was at each successive period, while society was but secondarily instrumental in making *them*, each of them (so far as causes can be assigned for its existence) being mainly an emanation not from the practical life of the period, but from the previous state of belief and thought. The weakness of the speculative propensity in mankind generally has not, therefore, prevented the progress of speculation from governing that of society at large; it has only, and too often, prevented progress altogether, where the intellectual progression has come to an early stand for want of sufficiently favorable circumstances.

From this accumulated evidence, we are justified in concluding, that the order of human progression in all respects will mainly depend on the order of progression in the intellectual convictions of mankind, that is, on the law of the successive transformations of human opinions. The question remains, whether this law can be determined; at first from history as an empirical law, then converted into a scientific theorem by deducing it *a priori* from the principles of human nature. As the progress of knowledge and the changes in the opinions of mankind are very slow, and manifest themselves in a well-defined manner only at long intervals, it can not be expected that the general order of sequence should be discoverable from the examination of less than a very considerable part of the duration of the social progress. It is necessary to take into consideration the whole of past time, from the first recorded condition of the human race, to the memorable phenomena of the last and present generations.

*Prospects of Sociological Inquiry.* The investigation which I have thus endeavored to characterize has been systematically attempted, up to the present time, by M. Comte alone. His work is hitherto the only known example of the study of social phenomena according to this conception of the Historical Method. Without discussing here the worth of his conclusions, and especially of his predictions and recommendations with respect to the Future of society, which appear to me greatly inferior in value to his appreciation of the Past, I shall confine myself to mentioning one important generalization, which M. Comte regards as the fundamental law of the progress of human knowledge. Speculation he conceives to have, on every subject of human inquiry, three successive stages; in the first of which it tends to explain the phenomena by supernatural agencies, in the second by metaphysical abstractions, and in the third or final state confines itself to ascertaining their laws of succession and similitude. This generalization appears to me to have that high degree of scientific evidence which is derived from the concurrence of the indications of history with the probabilities derived from the constitution of the human mind. Nor could it be easily conceived, from the mere enunciation of such a proposition, what a flood of light it lets in upon the whole course of history, when its consequences are traced, by connecting with each of the three states of human intellect which it distinguishes, and with each successive modifica-

tion of those three states, the correlative condition of other social phenomena.\*

But whatever decision competent judges may pronounce on the results arrived at by any individual inquirer, the method now characterized is that by which the derivative laws of social order and of social progress must be sought. By its aid we may hereafter succeed not only in looking far forward into the future history of the human race, but in determining what artificial means may be used, and to what extent, to accelerate the natural progress in so far as it is beneficial; to compensate for whatever may be its inherent inconveniences or disadvantages; and to guard against the dangers or accidents to which our species is exposed from the necessary incidents of its progression. Such practical instructions, founded on the highest branch of speculative sociology, will form the noblest and most beneficial portion of the Political Art.

That of this science and art even the foundations are but beginning to be laid, is sufficiently evident. But the superior minds are fairly turning themselves toward that object. It has become the aim of really scientific

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\*This great generalization is often unfavorably criticised (as by Dr. Whewell, for instance) under a misapprehension of its real import. The doctrine, that the theological explanation of phenomena belongs only to the infancy of our knowledge of them, ought not to be construed as if it was equivalent to the assertion, that mankind, as their knowledge advances, will necessarily cease to believe in any kind of theology. This was M. Comte's opinion; but it is by no means implied in his fundamental theorem. All that is implied is, that in an advanced state of human knowledge, no other Ruler of the World will be acknowledged than one who rules by universal laws, and does not at all, or does not unless in very peculiar cases, produce events by special interpositions. Originally all natural events were ascribed in such interpositions. At present every educated person rejects this explanation in regard to all classes of phenomena of which the laws have been fully ascertained; though some have not yet reached the point of referring all phenomena to the idea of Law, but believe that rain and sunshine, famine and pestilence, victory and defeat, death and life, are issues which the Creator does not leave to the operation of his general laws, but reserves to be decided by express acts of volition. M. Comte's theory is the negation of this doctrine.

Dr. Whewell equally misunderstands M. Comte's doctrine respecting the second or metaphysical stage of speculation. M. Comte did not mean that "discussions concerning ideas" are limited to an early stage of inquiry, and cease when science enters into the positive stage. (*Philosophy of Discovery*, pp. 226 et seq.) In all M. Comte's speculations as much stress is laid on the process of clearing up our conceptions as on the ascertainment of facts. When M. Comte speaks of the metaphysical stage of speculation, he means the stage in which men speak of "Nature" and other abstractions as if they were active forces, producing effects; when Nature is said to do this, or forbid that; when Nature's horror of a vacuum, Nature's non-admission of a break, Nature's *vis medicatrix*, were offered as explanations of phenomena; when the qualities of things were mistaken for real entities dwelling in the things; when the phenomena of living bodies were thought to be accounted for by being referred to a "vital force;" when, in short, the abstract names of phenomena were mistaken for the causes of their existence. In this sense of the word it can not be reasonably denied that the metaphysical explanation of phenomena, equally with the theological, gives way before the advance of real science.

That the final, or positive stage, as conceived by M. Comte, has been equally misunderstood, and that, notwithstanding some expressions open to just criticism, M. Comte never dreamed of denying the legitimacy of inquiry into all causes which are accessible to human investigations, I have pointed out in a former place.

thinkers to connect by theories the facts of universal history: it is acknowledged to be one of the requisites of a general system of social doctrine, that it should explain, so far as the data exist, the main facts of history; and a Philosophy of History is generally admitted to be at once the verification, and the initial form, of the Philosophy of the Progress of Society.

If the endeavors now making in all the more cultivated nations, and beginning to be made even in England (usually the last to enter into the general movement of the European mind) for the construction of a Philosophy of History, shall be directed and controlled by those views of the nature of sociological evidence which I have (very briefly and imperfectly) attempted to characterize; they can not fail to give birth to a sociological system widely removed from the vague and conjectural character of all former attempts, and worthy to take its place, at last, among the sciences. When this time shall come, no important branch of human affairs will be any longer abandoned to empiricism and unscientific surmise: the circle of human knowledge will be complete, and it can only thereafter receive further enlargement by perpetual expansion from within.

*Historical Facts, Uniform Laws, and Statistics.* The doctrine which the preceding chapters were intended to enforce and elucidate—that the collective series of social phenomena, in other words the course of history, is subject to general laws, which philosophy may possibly detect—has been familiar for generations to the scientific thinkers of the Continent, and has for the last quarter of a century passed out of their peculiar domain, into that of newspapers and ordinary political discussion. In our own country, however, at the time of the first publication of this Treatise, it was almost a novelty; and the prevailing habits of thought on historical subjects were the very reverse of a preparation for it. Since then a great change has taken place, and has been eminently promoted by the important work of Mr. Buckle; who, with characteristic energy, flung down this great principle, together with many striking exemplifications of it, into the arena of popular discussion, to be fought over by a sort of combatants in the presence of a sort of spectators, who would never even have been aware that there existed such a principle if they had been left to learn its existence from the speculations of pure science. And hence has arisen a considerable amount of controversy, tending not only to make the principle rapidly familiar to the majority of cultivated minds, but also to clear it from the confusions and misunderstandings by which it was but natural that it should for a time be clouded, and which impair the worth of the doctrine to those who accept it, and are the stumbling-block of many who do not.

Among the impediments to the general acknowledgment, by thoughtful minds, of the subjection of historical facts to scientific laws, the most fundamental continues to be that which is grounded on the doctrine of Free Will, or, in other words, on the denial that the law of invariable Causation holds true of human volitions; for if it does not, the course of history, being the result of human volitions, can not be a subject of scientific laws, since the volitions on which it depends can neither be foreseen, nor reduced to



any canon of regularity even after they have occurred. I have discussed this question, as far as seemed suitable to the occasion, in a former chapter; and I only think it necessary to repeat, that the doctrine of the Causation of human actions, improperly called the doctrine of Necessity, affirms no mysterious *nexus*, or overruling fatality: it asserts only that men's actions are the joint result of the general laws and circumstances of human nature, and of their own particular characters; those characters again being the consequence of the natural and artificial circumstances that constituted their education, among which circumstances must be reckoned their own conscious efforts. Any one who is willing to take (if the expression may be permitted) the trouble of thinking himself into the doctrine as thus stated, will find it, I believe, not only a faithful interpretation of the universal experience of human conduct, but a correct representation of the mode in which he himself, in every particular case, spontaneously interprets his own experience of that conduct.

But if this principle is true of individual man, it must be true of collective man. If it is the law of human life, the law must be realized in history. The experience of human affairs when looked at *en masse*, must be in accordance with it if true, or repugnant to it if false. The support which this *a posteriori* verification affords to the law, is the part of the case which has been most clearly and triumphantly brought out by Mr. Buckle.\*

The facts of statistics, since they have been made a subject of careful recordation and study, have yielded conclusions, some of which have been very startling to persons not accustomed to regard moral actions as subject to uniform laws. The very events which in their own nature appear most capricious and uncertain, and which in any individual case no attainable degree of knowledge would enable us to foresee, occur, when considerable numbers are taken into the account, with a degree of regularity approaching to mathematical. What act is there which all would consider as more completely dependent on individual character, and on the exercise of individual free will, than that of slaying a fellow-creature? Yet in any large country, the number of murders, in proportion to the population, varies (it has been found) very little from one year to another, and in its variations never deviates widely from a certain average. What is still more remarkable, there is a similar approach to constancy in the proportion of these murders annually committed with every particular kind of instrument. There is a like approximation to identity, as between one year and another, in the comparative number of legitimate and of illegitimate births. The same thing is found true of suicides, accidents, and all other social phenomena of which the registration is sufficiently perfect; one of the most curiously illustrative examples being the fact, ascertained by the registers of the London and Paris post-offices, that the number of letters posted which the writers have forgotten to direct, is nearly the same, in proportion to the whole number of letters posted, in one year as in another. "Year after year," says Mr.

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\* See this volume, pp. 114 ff., for Buckle's interpretation of statistical evidence of the kind Mill goes on to consider. (Ed.)

Buckle, "the same proportion of letter-writers forget this simple act; so that for each successive period we can actually foretell the number of persons whose memory will fail them in regard to this trifling, and as it might appear, accidental occurrence."<sup>\*</sup>

This singular degree of regularity *en masse*, combined with the extreme of irregularity in the cases composing the mass, is a felicitous verification *a posteriori* of the law of causation in its application to human conduct. Assuming the truth of that law, every human action, every murder, for instance, is the concurrent result of two sets of causes. On the one part, the general circumstances of the country and its inhabitants; the moral, educational, economical, and other influences operating on the whole people, and constituting what we term the state of civilization. On the other part, the great variety of influences special to the individual: his temperament, and other peculiarities of organization, his parentage, habitual associates, temptations, and so forth. If we now take the whole of the instances which occur within a sufficiently large field to exhaust all the combinations of these special influences, or, in other words, to eliminate chance; and if all these instances have occurred within such narrow limits of time, that no material change can have taken place in the general influences constituting the state of civilization of the country; we may be certain, that if human actions are governed by invariable laws, the aggregate result will be something like a constant quantity. The number of murders committed within that space and time, being the effect partly of general causes which have not varied, and partly of partial causes the whole round of whose variations has been included, will be, practically speaking, invariable.

Literally and mathematically invariable it is not, and could not be expected to be: because the period of a year is too short to include *all* the possible combinations of partial causes, while it is, at the same time, sufficiently long to make it probable that in some years at least, of every series, there will have been introduced new influences of a more or less general character; such as a more vigorous or a more relaxed police; some temporary excitement from political or religious causes; or some incident generally notorious, of a nature to act morbidly on the imagination. That in spite of these unavoidable imperfections in the data, there should be so very trifling a margin of variation in the annual results, is a brilliant confirmation of the general theory.

*The Significance of Moral Causes.* The same considerations which thus strikingly corroborate the evidence of the doctrine, that historical facts are the invariable effects of causes, tend equally to clear that doctrine from various misapprehensions, the existence of which has been put in evidence by the recent discussions. Some persons, for instance, seemingly imagine the doctrine to imply, not merely that the total number of murders committed in a given space and time is entirely the effect of the general circumstances of society, but that every particular murder is so too—that the individual murderer is, so to speak, a mere instrument in the hands of general causes

<sup>\*</sup>Buckle's *History of Civilization*, i., 30.

that he himself has no option, or, if he has, and chose to exercise it, some one else would be necessitated to take his place; that if any one of the actual murderers had abstained from the crime, some person who would otherwise have remained innocent, would have committed an extra murder to make up the average. Such a corollary would certainly convict any theory which necessarily led to it of absurdity. It is obvious, however, that each particular murder depends, not on the general state of society only, but on that combined with causes special to the case, which are generally much more powerful; and if these special causes, which have greater influence than the general ones in causing every particular murder, have no influence on the number of murders in a given period, it is because the field of observation is so extensive as to include all possible combinations of the special causes—all varieties of individual character and individual temptation compatible with the general state of society. The collective experiment, as it may be termed, exactly separates the effect of the general from that of the special causes, and shows the net result of the former; but it declares nothing at all respecting the amount of influence of the special causes, be it greater or smaller, since the scale of the experiment extends to the number of cases within which the effects of the special causes balance one another, and disappear in that of the general causes.

I will not pretend that all the defenders of the theory have always kept their language free from this same confusion, and have shown no tendency to exalt the influence of general causes at the expense of special. I am of opinion, on the contrary, that they have done so in a very great degree, and by so doing have encumbered their theory with difficulties, and laid it open to objections, which do not necessarily affect it. Some, for example (among whom is Mr. Buckle himself), have inferred, or allowed it to be supposed that they inferred, from the regularity in the recurrence of events which depend on moral qualities, that the moral qualities of mankind are little capable of being improved, or are of little importance in the general progress of society, compared with intellectual or economic causes. But to draw this inference is to forget that the statistical tables, from which the invariable averages are deduced, were compiled from facts occurring within narrow geographical limits and in a small number of successive years; that is, from a field the whole of which was under the operation of the same general causes, and during too short a time to allow of much change therein. All moral causes but those common to the country generally, have been eliminated by the great number of instances taken; and those which are common to the whole country have not varied considerably, in the short space of time comprised in the observations. If we admit the supposition that they have varied; if we compare one age with another, or one country with another, or even one part of a country with another, differing in position and character as to the moral elements, the crimes committed within a year give no longer the same, but a widely different numerical aggregate. And this can not but be the case: for, inasmuch as every single crime committed by an individual mainly depends on his moral

qualities, the crimes committed by the entire population of the country must depend in an equal degree on their collective moral qualities. To render this element inoperative upon the large scale, it would be necessary to suppose that the general moral average of mankind does not vary from country to country or from age to age; which is not true, and, even if it were true, could not possibly be proved by any existing statistics. I do not on this account the less agree in the opinion of Mr. Buckle, that the intellectual element in mankind, including in that expression the nature of their beliefs, the amount of their knowledge, and the development of their intelligence, is the predominant circumstance in determining their progress. But I am of this opinion, not because I regard their moral or economical condition either as less powerful or less variable agencies, but because these are in a great degree the consequences of the intellectual condition, and are, in all cases, limited by it; as was observed in the preceding chapter. The intellectual changes are the most conspicuous agents in history, not from their superior force, considered in themselves, but because practically they work with the united power belonging to all three.\*

*The Historical Importance of Eminent Men and of the Acts of Governments.* There is another distinction often neglected in the discussion of this subject, which it is extremely important to observe. The theory of the subjection of social progress to invariable laws, is often held in conjunction with the doctrine, that social progress can not be materially influenced by the exertions of individual persons, or by the acts of governments. But though these opinions are often held by the same persons, they are two very different opinions, and the confusion between them is the eternally recurring error of confounding Causation with Fatalism. Because whatever happens will be the effect of causes, human volitions among the rest, it does not follow that volitions, even those of peculiar individuals, are not of great efficacy as causes. If any one in a storm at sea, because about the same number of persons in every year perish by shipwreck, should conclude

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\*I have been assured by an intimate friend of Mr. Buckle that he would not have withheld his assent from these remarks, and that he never intended to affirm or imply that mankind are not progressive in their moral as well as in their intellectual qualities. "In dealing with his problem, he availed himself of the artifice resorted to by the Political Economist, who leaves out of consideration the generous and benevolent sentiments, and founds his science on the proposition that mankind are actuated by acquisitive propensities alone," not because such is the fact, but because it is necessary to begin by treating the principal influence as if it was the sole one, and make the due corrections afterward. "He desired to make abstraction of the intellect as the determining and dynamical element of the progression, eliminating the more dependent set of conditions, and treating the more active one as if it were an entirely independent variable."

The same friend of Mr. Buckle states that when he used expressions which seemed to exaggerate the influence of general at the expense of special causes, and especially at the expense of the influence of individual minds, Mr. Buckle really intended no more than to affirm emphatically that the greatest men can not effect great changes in human affairs unless the general mind has been in some considerable degree prepared for them by the general circumstances of the age; a truth which, of course, no one thinks of denying. And there certainly are passages in Mr. Buckle's writings which speak of the influence exercised by great individual intellects in as strong terms as could be desired.

that it was useless for him to attempt to save his own life, we should call him a Fatalist; and should remind him that the efforts of shipwrecked persons to save their lives are so far from being immaterial, that the average amount of those efforts is one of the causes on which the ascertained annual number of deaths by shipwreck depend. However universal the laws of social development may be, they can not be more universal or more rigorous than those of the physical agencies of nature; yet human will can convert these into instruments of its designs, and the extent to which it does so makes the chief difference between savages and the most highly civilized people. Human and social facts, from their more complicated nature, are not less, but more, modifiable than mechanical and chemical facts; human agency, therefore, has still greater power over them. And accordingly, those who maintain that the evolution of society depends exclusively, or almost exclusively, on general causes, always include among these the collective knowledge and intellectual development of the race. But if of the race, why not also of some powerful monarch or thinker, or of the ruling portion of some political society, acting through its government? Though the varieties of character among ordinary individuals neutralize one another on any large scale, exceptional individuals in important positions do not in any given age neutralize one another; there was not another Themistocles, or Luther, or Julius Cæsar, of equal powers and contrary dispositions, who exactly balanced the given Themistocles, Luther, and Cæsar, and prevented them from having any permanent effect. Moreover, for aught that appears, the volitions of exceptional persons, or the opinions and purposes of the individuals who at some particular time compose a government, may be indispensable links in the chain of causation by which even the general causes produce their effects; and I believe this to be the only tenable form of the theory.

Lord Macaulay, in a celebrated passage of one of his early essays (let me add that it was one which he did not himself choose to reprint), gives expression to the doctrine of the absolute inoperativeness of great men, more unqualified, I should think, than has been given to it by any writer of equal abilities. He compares them to persons who merely stand on a loftier height, and thence receive the sun's rays a little earlier, than the rest of the human race. "The sun illuminates the hills while it is still below the horizon, and truth is discovered by the highest minds a little before it becomes manifest to the multitude. This is the extent of their superiority. They are the first to catch and reflect a light which, without their assistance, must in a short time be visible to those who lie far beneath them."\* If this metaphor is to be carried out, it follows that if there had been no Newton, the world would not only have had the Newtonian system, but would have had it equally soon; as the sun would have risen just as early to spectators in the plain if there had been no mountain at hand to catch still earlier rays. And so it would be, if truths, like the sun, rose by their own proper

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\* Essay on Dryden, in *Miscellaneous Writings*, i., 186.

motion, without human effort; but not otherwise. I believe that if Newton had not lived, the world must have waited for the Newtonian philosophy until there had been another Newton, or his equivalent. No ordinary man, and no succession of ordinary men, could have achieved it. I will not go the length of saying that what Newton did in a single life, might not have been done in successive steps by some of those who followed him, each singly inferior to him in genius. But even the least of those steps required a man of great intellectual superiority. Eminent men do not merely see the coming light from the hill-top, they mount on the hill-top and evoke it; and if no one had ever ascended thither, the light, in many cases, might never have risen upon the plain at all. Philosophy and religion are abundantly amenable to general causes; yet few will doubt that, had there been no Socrates, no Plato, and no Aristotle, there would have been no philosophy for the next two thousand years, nor in all probability then; and that if there had been no Christ, and no St. Paul, there would have been no Christianity.

The point in which, above all, the influence of remarkable individuals is decisive, is in determining the celerity of the movement. In most states of society it is the existence of great men which decides even whether there shall be any progress. It is conceivable that Greece, or that Christian Europe, might have been progressive in certain periods of their history through general causes only: but if there had been no Mohammed, would Arabia have produced Avicenna or Averroes, or Caliphs of Bagdad or of Cordova? In determining, however, in what manner and order the progress of mankind shall take place if it take place at all, much less depends on the character of individuals. There is a sort of necessity established in this respect by the general laws of human nature—by the constitution of the human mind. Certain truths cannot be discovered, nor inventions made, unless certain others have been made first; certain social improvements, from the nature of the case, can only follow, and not precede, others. The order of human progress, therefore, may to a certain extent have definite laws assigned to it: while as to its celerity, or even as to its taking place at all, no generalization, extending to the human species generally, can possibly be made; but only some very precarious approximate generalizations, confined to the small portion of mankind in whom there has been any thing like consecutive progress within the historical period, and deduced from their special position, or collected from their particular history. Even looking to the manner of progress, the order of succession of social states, there is need of great flexibility in our generalizations. The limits of variation in the possible development of social, as of animal life, are a subject of which little is yet understood, and are one of the great problems in social science. It is, at all events, a fact, that different portions of mankind, under the influence of different circumstances, have developed themselves in a more or less different manner and into different forms; and among these determining circumstances, the individual character of their great speculative thinkers or practical organizers may well have been one. Who can tell how

profoundly the whole subsequent history of China may have been influenced by the individuality of Confucius? and of Sparta (and hence of Greece and the world) by that of Lycurgus?

Concerning the nature and extent of what a great man under favorable circumstances can do for mankind, as well as of what a government can do for a nation, many different opinions are possible; and every shade of opinion on these points is consistent with the fullest recognition that there are invariable laws of historical phenomena. Of course the degree of influence which has to be assigned to these more special agencies, makes a great difference in the precision which can be given to the general laws, and in the confidence with which predictions can be grounded on them. Whatever depends on the peculiarities of individuals, combined with the accident of the positions they hold, is necessarily incapable of being foreseen. Undoubtedly these casual combinations might be eliminated like any others, by taking a sufficiently large cycle: the peculiarities of a great historical character make their influence felt in history sometimes for several thousand years, but it is highly probable that they will make no difference at all at the end of fifty millions. Since, however, we can not obtain an average of the vast length of time necessary to exhaust all the possible combinations of great men and circumstances, as much of the law of evolution of human affairs as depends upon this average, is and remains inaccessible to us; and within the next thousand years, which are of considerably more importance to us than the whole remainder of the fifty millions, the favorable and unfavorable combinations which will occur will be to us purely accidental. We can not foresee the advent of great men. Those who introduce new speculative thoughts or great practical conceptions into the world, cannot have their epoch fixed beforehand. What science can do, is this. It can trace through past history the general causes which had brought mankind into that preliminary state which, when the right sort of great man appeared, rendered them accessible to his influence. If this state continues, experience renders it tolerably certain that in a longer or shorter period the great man will be produced; provided that the general circumstances of the country and people are (which very often they are not) compatible with his existence; of which point also science can in some measure judge. It is in this manner that the results of progress, except as to the celerity of their production, can be, to a certain extent, reduced to regularity and law. And the belief that they can be so, is equally consistent with assigning very great, or very little efficacy, to the influence of exceptional men, or of the acts of governments. And the same may be said of all other accidents and disturbing causes.

It would nevertheless be a great error to assign only a trifling importance to the agency of eminent individuals, or of governments. It must not be concluded that the influence of either is small, because they can not bestow what the general circumstances of society, and the course of its previous history, have not prepared it to receive. Neither thinkers nor governments effect all that they intend, but in compensation they often

produce important results which they did not in the least foresee. Great men, and great actions, are seldom wasted; they send forth a thousand unseen influences, more effective than those which are seen; and though nine out of every ten things done, with a good purpose, by those who are in advance of their age, produce no material effect, the tenth thing produces effects twenty times as great as any one would have dreamed of predicting from it. Even the men who for want of sufficiently favorable circumstances left no impress at all upon their own age, have often been of the greatest value to posterity. Who could appear to have lived more entirely in vain than some of the early heretics? They were burned or massacred, their writings extirpated, their memory anathematized, and their very names and existence left for seven or eight centuries in the obscurity of musty manuscripts—their history to be gathered, perhaps, only from the sentences by which they were condemned. Yet the memory of these men—men who resisted certain pretensions or certain dogmas of the Church in the very age in which the unanimous assent of Christendom was afterward claimed as having been given to them, and asserted as the ground of their authority—broke the chain of tradition, established a series of precedents for resistance, inspired later Reformers with the courage, and armed them with the weapons, which they needed when mankind were better prepared to follow their impulse. To this example from men, let us add another from governments. The comparatively enlightened rule of which Spain had the benefit during a considerable part of the eighteenth century, did not correct the fundamental defects of the Spanish people; and in consequence, though it did great temporary good, so much of that good perished with it, that it may plausibly be affirmed to have had no permanent effect. The case has been cited as a proof how little governments can do in opposition to the causes which have determined the general character of the nation. It does show how much there is which they cannot do; but not that they can do nothing. Compare what Spain was at the beginning of that half-century of liberal government, with what she had become at its close. That period fairly let in the light of European thought upon the more educated classes; and it never afterward ceased to go on spreading. Previous to that time the change was in an inverse direction; culture, light, intellectual and even material activity, were becoming extinguished. Was it nothing to arrest this downward and convert it into an upward course? How much that Charles the Third and Aranda could not do, has been the ultimate consequence of what they did! To that half-century Spain owes that she has got rid of the Inquisition, that she has got rid of the monks, that she now has parliaments and (save in exceptional intervals) a free press, and the feelings of freedom and citizenship, and is acquiring railroads and all the other constituents of material and economical progress. In the Spain which preceded that era, there was not a single element at work which could have led to these results in any length of time, if the country had continued to be governed as it was by the last princes of the Austrian dynasty, or if the Bourbon rulers had been from the first what, both in Spain and in Naples, they afterward became.



And if a government can do much, even when it seems to have done little, in causing positive improvement, still greater are the issues dependent on it in the way of warding off evils, both internal and external, which else would stop improvement altogether. A good or a bad counselor, in a single city at a particular crisis, has affected the whole subsequent fate of the world. It is as certain as any contingent judgment respecting historical events can be, that if there had been no Themistocles there would have been no victory of Salamis; and had there not, where would have been all our civilization? How different, again, would have been the issue if Epamindondas, or Timoleon, or even Iphicrates, instead of Chares and Lysicles, had commanded at Chæroneia. As is well said in the second of two *Essays on the Study of History*,\*—in my judgment the soundest and most philosophical productions which the recent controversies on this subject have called forth—historical science authorizes not absolute, but only conditional predictions. General causes count for much, but individuals also “produce great changes in history, and color its whole complexion long after their death. . . . No one can doubt that the Roman republic would have subsided into a military despotism if Julius Cæsar had never lived” (thus much was rendered practically certain by general causes); “but is it at all clear that in that case Gaul would ever have formed a province of the empire? Might not Varus have lost his three legions on the banks of the Rhone? and might not that river have become the frontier instead of the Rhine? This might well have happened if Cæsar and Crassus had changed provinces; and it is surely impossible to say that in such an event the venue (as lawyers say) of European civilization might not have been changed. The Norman Conquest in the same way was as much the act of a single man, as the writing of a newspaper article; and knowing as we do the history of that man and his family, we can retrospectively predict with all but infallible certainty, that no other person” (no other in that age, I presume, is meant) “could have accomplished the enterprise. If it had not been accomplished, is there any ground to suppose that either our history or our national character would have been what they are?”

As is most truly remarked by the same writer, the whole stream of Grecian history, as cleared up by Mr. Grote, is one series of examples how often events on which the whole destiny of subsequent civilization turned were dependent on the personal character for good or evil of some one individual. It must be said, however, that Greece furnishes the most extreme example of this nature to be found in history, and is a very exaggerated specimen of the general tendency. It has happened only that once, and will probably never happen again, that the fortunes of mankind depended upon keeping a certain order of things in existence in a single town, or a country scarcely larger than Yorkshire; capable of being ruined or saved by a hundred causes, of very slight magnitude in comparison with the general tendencies of human affairs. Neither ordinary accidents, nor the characters of individuals, can ever again be so vitally important as they then

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\*In the *Cornhill Magazine* for June and July, 1861.

were. The longer our species lasts, and the more civilized it becomes, the more, as Comte remarks, does the influence of past generations over the present, and of mankind *en masse* over every individual in it, predominate over other forces; and though the course of affairs never ceases to be susceptible of alteration both by accidents and by personal qualities, the increasing preponderance of the collective agency of the species over all minor causes, is constantly bringing the general evolution of the race into something which deviates less from a certain and preappointed track. Historical science, therefore, is always becoming more possible; not solely because it is better studied, but because, in every generation, it becomes better adapted for study.

## BUCKLE (1821-1862)

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HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE was born in 1821 and died in 1862. His *History of Civilization in England* (first published in 1857) is chiefly of interest because of its uncompromising, if somewhat confused, insistence upon the need to interpret history in a manner which exhibited historical developments as occurring in accordance with universal laws. Buckle, like Mill, had been profoundly impressed by Comte's demand that society should be studied through the application of scientific procedures; and for Buckle this meant the discovery, by inductive inquiry, of causal uniformities governing social life and development. The evidence provided by statistical surveys is adduced by him as a reason for believing that laws of the sort he has in mind in fact operate, and he contrasts the employment of such techniques of observation and generalization with the methods used by "metaphysicians," who seek to frame universal truths about the human mind and character by appealing to the findings of individual introspective psychology—the metaphysician, according to Buckle, "has taken for granted that, by studying one mind, he can discover the laws of all minds."

In his discussion of the sources of resistance to the scientific study of history, Buckle lays the main blame on two "dogmas"—the dogma of "Free Will" and the dogma of "Predestination." The first of these rests upon metaphysical assumptions, the second upon theological ones; and both have, in different ways, inhibited men from undertaking an examination of history in a scientific spirit. The doctrine of predestination is a barren hypothesis "because, being beyond the province of our knowledge, we have no means of ascertaining either its truth or its falsehood"; the doctrine of free will

depends upon the evidence of "man's consciousness" of freedom, and this is a wholly unreliable guide.

In constructing a "philosophical" or properly scientific history, it is necessary to take into account both the ways in which man modifies nature and the ways in which nature modifies man. Buckle's discussion of the ways in which these two "modifications" operate in history is not assisted by his failure to make certain fundamental distinctions. He does not, for example, differentiate clearly between, on the one hand, empirical hypotheses and generalizations and, on the other, methodological precepts, regulative principles of inquiry and research; nor is it always obvious that he was aware of the difference between statements which purport to be statements of law and statements which do no more than assert the existence of trends or tendencies. Further, the physical and mental laws on which he lays such stress are frequently spoken of as if they were themselves causal agencies or forces, promoting the occurrence of certain social phenomena by a kind of irresistible momentum. But, however this may be, he was certainly confident that, by taking into account such "physical" factors as climatic conditions and the different sorts of food which men eat, important conclusions could be reached as to why various civilizations have developed in the way in which they have and (more particularly) why European civilization is significantly different from others. For Buckle held that in Europe a combination of environmental factors had made it possible for men's intellectual capacities and equipment to develop to a level unattained elsewhere; it was in the European's ability to master physical nature and, through his increasing technical knowledge, to force it to submit to his purposes that the distinctive character of European achievement consisted. Thus, as with Comte, the crucial factor in human progress is ultimately located in the development of knowledge: it is the "laws" according to which intellectual activity advances that provide the key to European history, and not (Buckle is anxious to emphasize) the state of men's moral opinions, these having scarcely varied from age to age.

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## History and the Operation of Universal Laws\*

*The Need for a Science of History.* Of all the great branches of human knowledge, history is that upon which most has been written, and which

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\*This selection consists of most of Chapter I and extracts from Chapters II, III, and IV of Volume I of the *History of Civilization in England*.

has always been most popular. And it seems to be the general opinion that the success of historians has, on the whole, been equal to their industry; and that if on this subject much has been studied, much also is understood.

This confidence in the value of history is very widely diffused, as we see in the extent to which it is read, and in the share it occupies in all plans of education. Nor can it be denied that, in a certain point of view, such confidence is perfectly justifiable. It cannot be denied that materials have been collected which, when looked at in the aggregate, have a rich and imposing appearance. The political and military annals of all the great countries in Europe, and of most of those out of Europe, have been carefully compiled, put together in a convenient form, and the evidence on which they rest has been tolerably well sifted. Great attention has been paid to the history of legislation, also to that of religion: while considerable, though inferior, labor has been employed in tracing the progress of science, of literature, of the fine arts, of useful inventions, and, latterly, of the manners and comforts of the people. In order to increase our knowledge of the past, antiquities of every kind have been examined; the sites of ancient cities have been laid bare, coins dug up and deciphered, inscriptions copied, alphabets restored, hieroglyphics interpreted, and, in some instances, long-forgotten languages reconstructed and rearranged. Several of the laws which regulate the changes of human speech have been discovered, and, in the hands of philologists, have been made to elucidate even the most obscure periods in the early migration of nations. Political economy has been raised to a science, and by it much light has been thrown on the causes of that unequal distribution of wealth which is the most fertile source of social disturbance. Statistics have been so sedulously cultivated, that we have the most extensive information, not only respecting the material interests of men, but also respecting their moral peculiarities; such as, the amount of different crimes, the proportion they bear to each other, and the influence exercised over them by age, sex, education, and the like. With this great movement physical geography has kept pace: the phenomena of climate have been registered, mountains measured, rivers surveyed and tracked to their source, natural productions of all kinds carefully studied, and their hidden properties unfolded: while every food which sustains life has been chemically analyzed, its constituents numbered and weighed, and the nature of the connection between them and the human frame has, in many cases, been satisfactorily ascertained. At the same time, and that nothing should be left undone which might enlarge our knowledge of the events by which man is affected, there have been instituted circumstantial researches in many other departments; so that in regard to the most civilized people, we are now acquainted with the rate of their mortality, of their marriages, the proportion of their births, the character of their employments, and the fluctuations both in their wages and in the prices of the commodities necessary to their existence. These and similar facts have been collected, methodized, and are ripe for use. Such results, which form, as it were, the anatomy of a nation, are remarkable for their minuteness;

and to them there have been joined other results less minute, but more extensive. Not only have the actions and characteristics of the great nations been recorded, but a prodigious number of different tribes in all the parts of the known world have been visited and described by travellers, thus enabling us to compare the condition of mankind in every stage of civilization, and under every variety of circumstance. When we moreover add, that this curiosity respecting our fellow creatures is apparently insatiable; that it is constantly increasing; that the means of gratifying it are also increasing, and that most of the observations which have been made are still preserved;—when we put all these things together, we may form a faint idea of the immense value of that vast body of facts which we now possess, and by the aid of which the progress of mankind is to be investigated.

But if, on the other hand, we are to describe the use that has been made of these materials, we must draw a very different picture. The unfortunate peculiarity of the history of man is that, although its separate parts have been examined with considerable ability, hardly anyone has attempted to combine them into a whole, and ascertain the way in which they are connected with each other. In all the other great fields of inquiry, the necessity of generalization is universally admitted, and noble efforts are being made to rise from particular facts in order to discover the ways by which those facts are governed. So far, however, is this from being the usual course of historians, that among them a strange idea prevails, that their business is merely to relate events, which they may occasionally enliven by such moral and political reflections as seem likely to be useful. According to this scheme, any author who from indolence of thought, or from natural incapacity, is unfit to deal with the highest branches of knowledge, has only to pass some years in reading a certain number of books, and then he is qualified to be an historian: he is able to write the history of a great people, and his work becomes an authority on the subject which it professes to treat.

The establishment of this narrow standard has led to results very prejudicial to the progress of our knowledge. Owing to it, historians, taken as a body, have never recognized the necessity of such a wide and preliminary study as would enable them to grasp their subject in the whole of its natural relations. Hence the singular spectacle of one historian being ignorant of political economy; another knowing nothing of law; another nothing of ecclesiastical affairs and changes of opinion; another neglecting the philosophy of statistics, and another physical science: although these topics are the most essential of all, inasmuch as they comprise the principal circumstances by which the temper and character of mankind have been affected, and in which they are displayed. These important pursuits being, however, cultivated, some by one man, and some by another, have been isolated rather than united: the aid which might be derived from analogy and from mutual illustration has been lost; and no disposition has been shown to concentrate them upon history, of which they are, properly speaking, the necessary components.

Since the early part of the eighteenth century, a few great thinkers have indeed arisen, who have deplored the backwardness of history, and have done everything in their power to remedy it. But these instances have been extremely rare: so rare, that in the whole literature of Europe there are not more than three or four really original works which contain a systematic attempt to investigate the history of man according to those exhaustive methods which in other branches of knowledge have proved successful, and by which alone empirical observations can be raised to scientific truths.

Among historians in general, we find, after the sixteenth century, and especially during the last hundred years, several indications of an increasing comprehensiveness of view, and of a willingness to incorporate into their works subjects which they would formerly have excluded. By this means their assemblage of topics has become more diversified, and the mere collection and relative position of parallel facts has occasionally suggested generalizations no traces of which can be found in the earlier literature of Europe. This has been a great gain, in so far as it has familiarized historians with a wider range of thought, and encouraged those habits of speculation, which, though liable to abuse, are the essential condition of all real knowledge, because without them no science can be constructed.

But, notwithstanding that the prospects of historical literature are certainly more cheering now than in any former age, it must be allowed that, with extremely few exceptions, they are only prospects, and that as yet scarcely anything has been done towards discovering the principles which govern the character and destiny of nations. What has been actually effected I shall endeavor to estimate in another part of this Introduction: at present it is enough to say, that for all the higher purposes of human thought history is still miserably deficient, and presents that confused and anarchical appearance natural to a subject of which the laws are unknown, and even the foundation unsettled.

Our acquaintance with history being so imperfect, while our materials are so numerous, it seems desirable that something should be done on a scale far larger than has hitherto been attempted, and that a strenuous effort should be made to bring up this great department of inquiry to a level with other departments, in order that we may maintain the balance and harmony of our knowledge. It is in this spirit that the present work has been conceived. To make the execution of it fully equal to the conception is impossible; still I hope to accomplish for the history of man something equivalent, or at all events analogous, to what has been effected by other inquirers for the different branches of natural science. In regard to nature, events apparently the most irregular and capricious have been explained, and have been shown to be in accordance with certain fixed and universal laws. This has been done because men of ability, and, above all, men of patient, untiring thought, have studied natural events with the view of discovering their regularity; and if human events were subjected to a similar treatment, we have every right to expect similar results. For it

is clear that they who affirm that the facts of history are incapable of being generalized, take for granted the very question at issue. Indeed they do more than this. They not only assume what they cannot prove, but they assume what in the present state of knowledge is highly improbable. Whoever is at all acquainted with what has been done during the last two centuries, must be aware that every generation demonstrates some events to be regular and predictable, which the preceding generation has declared to be irregular and unpredictable: so that the marked tendency of advancing civilization is to strengthen our belief in the universality of order, of method, and of law. This being the case, it follows that if any facts, or class of facts, have not yet been reduced to order, we, so far from pronouncing them to be irreducible, should rather be guided by our experience of the past, and should admit the probability that what we now call inexplicable will at some future time be explained. This expectation of discovering regularity in the midst of confusion is so familiar to scientific men, that among the most eminent of them it becomes an article of faith: and if the same expectation is not generally found among historians, it must be ascribed partly to their being of inferior ability to the investigators of nature, and partly to the greater complexity of those social phenomena with which their studies are concerned.

Both these causes have retarded the creation of the science of history. The most celebrated historians are manifestly inferior to the most successful cultivators of physical science: no one having devoted himself to history who in point of intellect is at all to be compared with Kepler, Newton, or many others that might be named. And as to the greater complexity of the phenomena, the philosophic historian is opposed by difficulties far more formidable than is the student of nature; since, while on the one hand, his observations are more liable to those causes of error which arise from prejudice and passion, he, on the other hand, is unable to employ the greatest physical resource of experiment, by which we can often simplify even the most intricate problems in the external world.

*The Two Dogmas of Free Will and Predestination.* It is not, therefore, surprising that the study of the movements of Man should be still in its infancy, as compared with the advanced state of the study of the movements of Nature. Indeed the difference between the progress of the two pursuits is so great, that while in physics the regularity of events, and the power of predicting them, are often taken for granted even in cases still unproved, a similar regularity is in history not only not taken for granted, but is actually denied. Hence it is that whoever wishes to raise history to a level with other branches of knowledge, is met by a preliminary obstacle; since he is told that in the affairs of men there is something mysterious and providential, which makes them impervious to our investigations, and which will always hide from us their future course. To this it might be sufficient to reply, that such an assertion is gratuitous; that it is by its nature incapable of proof; and that it is moreover opposed by the notorious fact that everywhere else increasing knowledge is accompanied by an increasing

confideoce in the uniformity with which, under the same circumstances, the same events must succeed each other. It will, however, be more satisfactory to probe the difficulty deeper, and inquire at once into the foundation of the common opinion that history must always remain in its present empirical state, and can never be raised to the rank of a science. We shall thus be led to one vast question, which indeed lies at the root of the whole subject, and is simply this: Are the actions of men, and therefore of societies, governed by fixed laws, or are they the result either of chance or of supernatural interference? The discussion of these alternatives will suggest some speculations of considerable interest.

For, in reference to this matter, there are two doctrines, which appear to represent different stages of civilization. According to the first doctrine, every event is single and isolated, and is merely considered as the result of a blind chance. This opinion, which is most natural to a perfectly ignorant people, would soon be weakened by that extension of experience which supplies a knowledge of those uniformities of succession and of coexistence that nature constantly presents. If, for example, wandering tribes, without the least tincture of civilization, lived entirely by hunting and fishing, they might well suppose that the appearance of their necessary food was the result of some accident which admitted of no explanation. The irregularity of the supply, and the apparent caprice with which it was sometimes abundant and sometimes scanty, would prevent them from suspecting any thing like method in the arrangements of nature; nor could their minds even conceive the existence of those general principles which govern the order of events, and by a knowledge of which we are often able to predict their future course. But when such tribes advance into the agricultural state, they, for the first time, use a food of which not only the appearance, but the very existence, seems to be the result of their own act. What they sow, that likewise do they reap. The provision necessary for their wants is brought more immediately under their own control, and is more palpably the consequence of their own labor. They perceive a distinct plan, and a regular uniformity of sequence, in the relation which the seed they put into the ground bears to the corn when arrived at maturity. They are now able to look to the future, not indeed with certainty, but with a confidence infinitely greater than they could have felt in their former and more precarious pursuits. Hence there arises a dim idea of the stability of events; and for the first time their begins to dawn upon the mind a faint conception of what at a later period are called the Laws of Nature. Every step in the great progress will make their view of this more clear. As their observations accumulate, and as their experience extends over a wider surface, they meet with uniformities that they had never suspected to exist, and the discovery of which weakens that doctrine of chance with which they had originally set out. Yet a little further, and a taste for abstract reasoning springs up; and then some among them generalize the observations that have been made, and despising the old popular opinion, believe that every event is linked to its antecedent by an inevitable connection.



that such antecedent is connected with a preceding fact; and that thus the whole world forms a necessary chain, in which indeed each man may play his part, but can by no means determine what that part shall be.

Thus it is that, in the ordinary march of society, an increasing perception of the regularity of nature destroys the doctrine of Chance, and replaces it by that of Necessary Connection. And it is, I think, highly probable that out of these two doctrines of Chance and Necessity there have respectively arisen the subsequent dogmas of Free Will and Predestination. . . .

These opposite doctrines of free will and predestination do, no doubt, supply a safe and simple solution of the obscurities of our being; and as they are easily understood, they are so suited to the average capacity of the human mind, that even at the present day an immense majority of men are divided between them; and they have not only corrupted the sources of our knowledge, but have given rise to religious sects, whose mutual animosities have disturbed society, and too often embittered the relations of private life. Among the more advanced European thinkers there is, however, a growing opinion that both doctrines are wrong, or, at all events, that we have no sufficient evidence of their truth. And as this is a matter of great moment, it is important, before we proceed further, to clear up as much of it as the difficulties inherent in these subjects will enable us to do.

Whatever doubts may be thrown on the account which I have given of the probable origin of the ideas of free will and predestination, there can, at all events, be no dispute as to the foundation on which those ideas are now actually based. The theory of predestination is founded on a theological hypothesis; that of free will on a metaphysical hypothesis. The advocates of the first proceed on a supposition for which, to say the least of it, they have as yet brought forward no good evidence. They require us to believe that the Author of Creation, whose beneficence they at the same time willingly allow, has, notwithstanding His supreme goodness, made an arbitrary distinction between the elect and the non-elect; that He has from all eternity doomed to perdition millions of creatures yet unborn, and whom His act alone can call into existence: and that He has done this, not in virtue of any principle of justice, but by a mere stretch of despotic power. This doctrine owes its authority among Protestants to the dark though powerful mind of Calvin: but in the early Church it was first systematically methodized by Augustin, who appears to have borrowed it from the Manicheans. At all events, and putting aside its incompatibility with other notions which are supposed to be fundamental, it must, in a scientific investigation, be regarded as a barren hypothesis, because, being beyond the province of our knowledge, we have no means of ascertaining either its truth or its falsehood.

The other doctrine, which has long been celebrated under the name of Free Will, is connected with Arminianism; but it in reality rests on the metaphysical dogma of the supremacy of human consciousness. Every man,

it is alleged, feels and knows that he is a free agent: nor can any subtleties of argument do away with our consciousness of possessing a free will. Now the existence of this supreme jurisdiction, which is thus to set at defiance all the ordinary methods of reasoning, involves two assumptions: of which the first, though possibly true, has never been proved; and the other is unquestionably false. These assumptions are, that there is an independent faculty called consciousness, and that the dictates of that faculty are infallible. But, in the first place, it is by no means certain that consciousness is a faculty; and some of the ablest thinkers have been of opinion that it is merely a state or condition of the mind. Should this turn out to be the case, the argument falls to the ground; since, even if we admit that all the faculties of the mind, when completely exercised, are equally accurate, no one will make the same claim for every condition into which the mind itself may be casually thrown. However, waiving this objection, we may, in the second place, reply, that even if consciousness is a faculty, we have the testimony of all history to prove its extreme fallibility. All the great stages through which, in the progress of civilization, the human race has successively passed have been characterized by certain mental peculiarities or convictions, which have left their impress upon the religion, the philosophy, and the morals of the age. Each of these convictions has been to one period a matter of faith, to another a matter for derision; and each of them has, in its own epoch, been as intimately bound up with the minds of men, and become as much a part of their consciousness, as is that opinion which we now term freedom of the will. Yet it is impossible that all these products of consciousness can be true, because many of them contradict each other. Unless, therefore, in different ages there are different standards of truth, it is clear that the testimony of a man's consciousness is no proof of an opinion being true; for if it were so, then two propositions diametrically opposed to each other might both be equally accurate. Besides this, another view may be drawn from the common operations of ordinary life. Are we not in certain circumstances conscious of the existence of certain spectres and phantoms; and yet is it not generally admitted that such beings have no existence at all? Should it be attempted to refute this argument by saying that such consciousness is apparent and not real, then I ask, What is it that judges between the consciousness which is genuine and that which is spurious? If this boasted faculty deceives us in some things, what security have we that it will not deceive us in others? If there is no security, the faculty is not trustworthy. If there is a security, then, whatever it may be, its existence shows the necessity for some authority to which consciousness is subordinate, and thus does away with that doctrine of the supremacy of consciousness, on which the advocates of free will are compelled to construct the whole of their theory. . . .

Fortunately, however, for the object of this work, the believer in the possibility of a science of history is not called upon to hold either the doctrine of predestined events, or that of freedom of the will; and the only positions which, in this stage of inquiry, I shall expect him to concede

are the following: That when we perform an action, we perform it in consequence of some motive or motives; that those motives are the results of some antecedents; and that, therefore, if we were acquainted with the whole of the antecedents, and with all the laws of their movements, we could with unerring certainty predict the whole of their immediate results. This, unless I am greatly mistaken, is the view which must be held by every man whose mind is unbiased by system, and who forms his opinions according to the evidence actually before him. If, for example, I am intimately acquainted with the character of any person, I can frequently tell how he will act under some given circumstances. Should I fail in this prediction, I must ascribe my error not to the arbitrary and capricious freedom of his will, nor to any supernatural prearrangement, for of neither of these things have we the slightest proof; but I must be content to suppose either that I had been misinformed as to some of the circumstances in which he was placed, or else that I had not sufficiently studied the ordinary operations of his mind. If, however, I were capable of correct reasoning, and if, at the same time, I had a complete knowledge both of his disposition and of all the events by which he was surrounded, I should be able to foresee the line of conduct which, in consequence of those events, he would adopt.

Rejecting, then, the metaphysical dogma of free will, and the theological dogma of predestined events, we are driven to the conclusion that the actions of men being determined solely by their antecedents, must have a character of uniformity, that is to say, must, under precisely the same circumstances, always issue in precisely the same results. And as all antecedents are either in the mind or out of it, we clearly see that all the variations in the results, in other words, all the changes of which history is full, all the vicissitudes of the human race, their progress or their decay, their happiness or their misery, must be the fruit of a double action; an action of external phenomena upon the mind, and another action of the mind upon the phenomena. . . .

*Statistical Evidence and the Regularity of the Moral World.* The most comprehensive inferences respecting the actions of men, which are admitted by all parties as incontestable truths, are derived from this or from analogous sources; they rest on statistical evidence, and are expressed in mathematical language. And whoever is aware of how much has been discovered by this single method, must not only recognize the uniformity with which mental phenomena succeed each other, but must, I think, feel sanguine that still more important discoveries will be made, so soon as there are brought into play those other powerful resources which even the present state of knowledge will abundantly supply. Without, however, anticipating future inquiries, we are, for the moment, only concerned with those proofs of the existence of a uniformity in human affairs which statisticians have been the first to bring forward. . . .

Of all offenses, it might well be supposed that the crime of murder is one of the most arbitrary and irregular. For when we consider that this,

though generally the crowning act of a long career of vice, is often the immediate result of what seems a sudden impulse; that when premeditated, its committal, even with the least chance of impunity, requires a rare combination of favorable circumstances for which the criminal will frequently wait; that he has thus to bide his time, and look for opportunities he cannot control; that when the time has come, his heart may fail him; that the question whether or not he shall commit the crime may depend on a balance of conflicting motives, such as fear of the law, a dread of the penalties held out by religion, the prickings of his own conscience, the apprehension of future remorse, the love of gain, jealousy, revenge, desperation;—when we put all these things together, there arises such a complication of causes, that we might reasonably despair of detecting any order or method in the result of those subtle and shifting agencies by which murder is either caused or prevented. But now, how stands the fact? The fact is, that murder is committed with as much regularity, and bears as uniform a relation to certain known circumstances, as do the movements of the tides, and the rotations of the seasons. M. Quetelet, who has spent his life in collecting and methodizing the statistics of different countries, states, as the result of his laborious researches, that "in every thing which concerns crime, the same numbers re-occur with a constancy which cannot be mistaken; and that this is the case even with those crimes which seem quite independent of human foresight, such, for instance, as murders, which are generally committed after quarrels arising from circumstances apparently casual. Nevertheless, we know from experience that every year there not only take place nearly the same number of murders, but that even the instruments by which they are committed are employed in the same proportion." This was the language used in 1835 by confessedly the first statistician in Europe, and every subsequent investigation has confirmed his accuracy. For later inquiries have ascertained the extraordinary fact, that the uniform reproduction of crime is more clearly marked, and more capable of being predicted, than are the physical laws connected with the disease and destruction of our bodies. Thus, for instance, the number of persons accused of crime in France between 1826 and 1844 was, by a singular coincidence, about equal to the male deaths which took place in Paris during the same period, the difference being that the fluctuations in the amount of crime were actually smaller than the fluctuations in the mortality; while a similar regularity was observed in each separate offense, all of which obeyed the same law of uniform and periodical repetition.

This, indeed, will appear strange to those who believe that human actions depend more on the peculiarities of each individual than on the general state of society. But another circumstance remains behind still more striking. Among public and registered crimes, there is none which seems so completely dependent on the individual as suicide. Attempts to murder or rob may be, and constantly are, successfully resisted; baffled sometimes by the party attacked, sometimes by the officers of justice. But

an attempt to commit suicide is much less liable to interruption. The man who is determined to kill himself, is not prevented at the last moment by the struggles of an enemy; and as he can easily guard against the interference of the civil power, his act becomes as it were isolated; it is cut off from foreign disturbances, and seems more clearly to be the product of his own volition than any other offense could possibly be. We may also add that, unlike crimes in general, it is rarely caused by the instigation of confederates; so that men, not being goaded into it by their companions, are uninfluenced by one great class of external associations which might hamper what is termed the freedom of their will. It may, therefore, very naturally be thought impracticable to refer suicide to general principles, or to detect anything like regularity in an offense which is so eccentric, so solitary, so impossible to control by legislation, and which the most vigilant police can do nothing to diminish. There is also another obstacle that impedes our view: this is, that even the best evidence respecting suicide must always be very imperfect. In cases of drowning, for example, deaths are liable to be returned as suicides which are accidental; while, on the other hand, some are called accidental which are voluntary. Thus it is, that self-murder seems to be not only capricious and uncontrollable, but also very obscure in regard to proof; so that on all these grounds it might be reasonable to despair of ever tracing it to those general causes by which it is produced.

These being the peculiarities of this singular crime, it is surely an astonishing fact, that all the evidence we possess respecting it points to one great conclusion, and can leave no doubt on our minds that suicide is merely the product of the general condition of society, and that the individual felon only carries into effect what is a necessary consequence of preceding circumstances. In a given state of society, a certain number of persons must put an end to their own life. This is the general law; and the special question as to who shall commit the crime depends of course upon special laws; which, however, in their total action, must obey the large social law to which they are subordinate. And the power of the larger law is so irresistible, that neither the love of life nor the fear of another world can avail anything towards even checking its operation. The causes of this remarkable regularity I shall hereafter examine; but the existence of the regularity is familiar to whoever is conversant with moral statistics. In the different countries for which we have returns, we find year by year the same proportion of persons putting an end to their own existence; so that, after making allowance for the impossibility of collecting complete evidence, we are able to predict, within a very small limit of error, the number of voluntary deaths for each ensuing period; supposing, of course, that the social circumstances do not undergo any marked change. Even in London, notwithstanding the vicissitudes incidental to the largest and most luxurious capital in the world, we find a regularity greater than could be expected by the most sanguine believer in social laws; since political excitement, mercantile excitement, and the misery produced by

the dearness of food, are all causes of suicide, and are all constantly varying. Nevertheless, in this vast metropolis, about 240 persons every year make away with themselves; the annual suicides oscillating, from the pressure of temporary causes, between 266, the highest, and 213, the lowest. In 1846, which was the great year of excitement caused by the railway panic, the suicides in London were 266; in 1847 began a slight improvement, and they fell to 256; in 1848 they were 247; in 1849 they were 213; and in 1850 they were 229.

Such is some, and only some, of the evidence we now possess respecting the regularity with which, in the same states of society, the same crimes are necessarily reproduced. To appreciate the full force of this evidence, we must remember that it is not an arbitrary selection of particular facts, but that it is generalized from an exhaustive statement of criminal statistics, consisting of many millions of observations, extending over countries in different grades of civilization, with different laws, different opinions, different morals, different habits. If we add to this, that these statistics have been collected by persons specially employed for that purpose, with every means of arriving at the truth, and with no interest to deceive, it surely must be admitted that the existence of crime according to a fixed and uniform scheme, is a fact more clearly attested than any other in the moral history of man. We have here parallel chains of evidence formed with extreme care, under the most different circumstances, and all pointing in the same direction; all of them forcing us to the conclusion, that the offenses of men are the result not so much of the vices of the individual offender as of that state of society into which that individual is thrown. This is an inference resting on broad and tangible proofs accessible to all the world; and as such cannot be overturned, or even impeached, by any of those hypotheses with which metaphysicians and theologians have hitherto perplexed the study of past events.

Those readers who are acquainted with the manner in which in the physical world the operations of the laws of nature are constantly disturbed, will expect to find in the moral world disturbances equally active. Such aberrations proceed, in both instances, from minor laws, which at particular points meet the larger laws, and thus alter their normal action. Of this, the science of mechanics affords a good example in the instance of that beautiful theory called the parallelogram of forces; according to which the forces are to each other in the same proportion as is the diagonal of their respective parallelograms. This is a law pregnant with great results; it is connected with those important mechanical resources, the composition and resolution of forces; and no one acquainted with the evidence on which it stands, ever thought of questioning its truth. But the moment we avail ourselves of it for practical purposes, we find that in its action it is warped by other laws, such as those concerning the friction of air, and the different density of the bodies on which we operate, arising from their chemical composition, or, as some suppose, from their atomic arrangement. Perturbations being thus let in, the pure and simple action

of the mechanical law disappears. Still, and although the results of the law are incessantly disturbed, the law itself remains intact. Just in the same way, the great social law, that the moral actions of men are the product not of their volition, but of their antecedents, is itself liable to disturbances which trouble its operation without affecting its truth. And this is quite sufficient to explain those slight variations which we find from year to year in the total amount of crime produced by the same country. Indeed, looking at the fact that the moral world is far more abundant in materials than the physical world, the only ground for astonishment is, that these variations should not be greater; and from the circumstance that the discrepancies are so trifling, we may form some idea of the prodigious energy of those vast social laws which, though constantly interrupted, seem to triumph over every obstacle, and which, when examined by the aid of large numbers, scarcely undergo any sensible perturbation.

Nor is it merely the crimes of men which are marked by this uniformity of sequence. Even the number of marriages annually contracted, is determined, not by the temper and wishes of individuals, but by large general facts, over which individuals can exercise no authority. It is now known that marriages bear a fixed and definite relation to the price of corn; and in England the experience of a century has proved that, instead of having any connection with personal feelings, they are simply regulated by the average earnings of the great mass of people: so that this immense social and religious institution is not only swayed, but is completely controlled by the price of food and the rate of wages. In other cases, uniformity has been detected, though the causes of the uniformity are still unknown. Thus, to give a curious instance, we are now able to prove that even the aberrations of memory are marked by this general character of necessity and invariable order. The post-offices of London and Paris have latterly published returns of the number of letters which the writers, through forgetfulness, omitted to direct; and, making allowance for the difference of circumstances, the returns are year after year copies of each other. Year after year the same proportion of letter-writers forget this simple act; so that for each successive period we can actually foretell the number of persons whose memory will fail them in regard to this trifling, and, as it might appear, accidental occurrence.

To those who have a steady conception of the regularity of events, and have firmly seized the great truth that the actions of men, being guided by their antecedents, are in reality never inconsistent, but, however capricious they may appear, only form part of one vast scheme of universal order, of which we in the present state of knowledge can barely see the outline,—to those who understand this, which is at once the key and the basis of history, the facts just adduced, so far from being strange, will be precisely what would have been expected, and ought long since to have been known. Indeed, the progress of inquiry is becoming so rapid and so earnest, that I entertain little doubt that before another century has elapsed, the chain of evidence will be complete, and it will be as rare

to find an historian who denies the undeviating regularity of the moral world, as it now is to find a philosopher who denies the regularity of the material world.

*The Influence Exercised by Physical Laws.* It will be observed that the preceding proofs of our actions being regulated by law, have been derived from statistics; a branch of knowledge which, though still in its infancy, has already thrown more light on the study of human nature than all the sciences put together. But although the statisticians have been the first to investigate this great subject by treating it according to those methods of reasoning which in other fields have been found successful; and although they have, by the application of numbers, brought to bear upon it a very powerful engine for eliciting truth,—we must not, on that account, suppose that there are no other resources remaining by which it may likewise be cultivated: nor should we infer that because the physical sciences have not yet been applied to history, they are therefore inapplicable to it. Indeed, when we consider the incessant contact between man and the external world, it is certain that there must be an intimate connection between human actions and physical laws: so that if physical science has not hitherto been brought to bear upon history, the reason is either that historians have not perceived the connection, or else that, having perceived it, they have been destitute of the knowledge by which its workings can be traced. Hence there has arisen an unnatural separation of the two great departments of inquiry, the study of the internal and that of the external: and although, in the present state of European literature, there are some unmistakable symptoms of a desire to break down this artificial barrier, still it must be admitted that as yet nothing has actually been accomplished towards effecting so great an end. . . .

If we inquire what those physical agents are by which the human race is most powerfully influenced, we shall find that they may be classed under four heads: namely, Climate, Food, Soil, and the General Aspect of Nature; by which last, I mean those appearances which, though presented chiefly to the sight, have, through the medium of that or other senses, directed the association of ideas, and hence in different countries have given rise to different habits of national thought. To one of these four classes may be referred all the external phenomena by which Man has been permanently affected. The last of these classes, or what I call the General Aspect of Nature, produces its principal results by exciting the imagination, and by suggesting those innumerable superstitions which are the great obstacles to advancing knowledge. And as, in the infancy of a people, the power of such superstitions is supreme, it has happened that the various Aspects of Nature have caused corresponding varieties in the popular character, and have imparted to the national religion peculiarities which, under certain circumstances, it is impossible to efface. The other three agents, namely, Climate, Food, and Soil, have, so far as we are aware, had no direct influence of this sort; but they have, as I am about to prove, originated the most important consequences in regard to the



general organization of society, and from them there have followed many of those large and conspicuous differences between nations, which are often ascribed to some fundamental difference in the various races into which mankind is divided. But while such original distinctions of race are altogether hypothetical,\* the discrepancies which are caused by difference of climate, food and soil, are capable of a satisfactory explanation, and, when understood, will be found to clear up many of the difficulties which still obscure the study of history. I purpose, therefore, in the first place, to examine the laws of these three vast agents in so far as they are connected with Man in his social condition; and having traced the working of those laws with as much precision as the present state of physical knowledge will allow, I shall then examine the remaining agent, namely, the General Aspect of Nature, and shall endeavor to point out the most important divergencies to which its variations have, in different countries, naturally given rise. . . .

*The Superiority of the History of Europe.* The evidence that I have collected seems to establish two leading facts, which unless they can be impugned, are the necessary basis of universal history. The first fact is that in the civilizations out of Europe, the powers of nature have been far greater than those in Europe. The second fact is that those powers have worked immense mischief; and that while one division of them has caused an unequal distribution of wealth, another division of them has caused an unequal distribution of thought, by concentrating attention upon subjects which inflame the imagination. So far as the experience of the past can guide us, we may say that in all the extra-European civilizations these obstacles were insuperable; certainly no nation has yet overcome them. But Europe, being constructed upon a smaller plan than the other quarters of the world—being also in a colder region, having a less exuberant soil, a less imposing aspect, and displaying in all her physical phenomena much greater feebleness—it was easier for Man to discard the superstitions which nature suggested to his imagination; and it was also easier for him to effect, not, indeed, a just division of wealth, but something nearer to it than was practicable in the older countries.

Hence it is that, looking at the history of the world, as a whole, the tendency has been, in Europe, to subordinate nature to man; out of Europe, to subordinate man to nature. To this there are, in barbarous countries, several exceptions; but in civilized countries the rule has been universal. The great division, therefore, between European civilization and non-European civilization, is the basis of the philosophy of history, since it suggests the important consideration that if we would understand,

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\*I cordially subscribe to the remark of one of the greatest thinkers of our time, who says of the supposed differences of race, "of all vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences." *Mill's Principles of Political Economy*, vol. i, p. 390. Ordinary writers are constantly falling into the error of assuming the existence of this difference; which may or may not exist, but which most assuredly has never been proved.

for instance, the history of India, we must make the external world our first study, because it has influenced man more than man has influenced it. If, on the other hand, we would understand the history of a country like France or England, we must make man our principal study, because nature being comparatively weak, every step in the great progress has increased the dominion of the human mind over the agencies of the external world. Even in those countries where the power of man has reached the highest point, the pressure of nature is still immense; but it diminishes in each succeeding generation, because our increasing knowledge enables us not so much to control nature, as to foretell her movements, and thus obviate many of the evils she would otherwise occasion. How successful our efforts have been is evident from the fact that the average duration of life constantly becomes longer, and the number of inevitable dangers fewer; and what makes this the more remarkable is that the curiosity of men is keener, and their contact with each other closer, than in any former period; so that while apparent hazards are multiplied, we find from experience that real hazards are, on the whole, diminished.

If, therefore, we take the largest possible view of the history of Europe, and confine ourselves entirely to the primary cause of its superiority over other parts of the world, we must resolve it into the encroachment of the mind of man upon the organic and inorganic forces of nature. To this all other causes are subordinate. For we have seen that wherever the powers of nature reached a certain height, the national civilization was irregularly developed, and the advance of the civilization stopped. The first essential was to limit the interference of these physical phenomena; and that was most likely to be accomplished where the phenomena were feeblest and least imposing. This was the case with Europe; it is accordingly in Europe alone that man has really succeeded in taming the energies of nature, bending them to his own will, turning them aside from their ordinary course, and compelling them to minister to his happiness, and subserve the general purposes of human life.

All around us are the traces of this glorious and successful struggle. Indeed, it seems as if in Europe there was nothing man feared to attempt. The invasions of the sea repelled, and whole provinces, as in the case of Holland, rescued from its grasp; mountains cut through, and turned into level roads; soils of the most obstinate sterility becoming exuberant, from the mere advance of chemical knowledge; while, in regard to electric phenomena, we see the subtlest, the most rapid, and the most mysterious of all forces, made the medium of thought, and obeying even the most capricious behests of the human mind. . . .

From these facts it may be fairly inferred, that the advance of European civilization is characterized by a diminishing influence of physical laws and an increasing influence of mental laws. The complete proof of this generalization can be collected only from history; and therefore I must reserve a large share of the evidence on which it is founded for the future volumes of this work. But that the proposition is fundamentally true must be admitted by whoever, in addition to the arguments just

adduced, will concede two premises, neither of which seems susceptible of much dispute. The first premise is that we are in possession of no evidence that the powers of nature have ever been permanently increased; and that we have no reason to expect that any such increase can take place. The other premise is that we have abundant evidence that the resources of the human mind have become more powerful, more numerous, and more able to grapple with the difficulties of the external world; because every fresh accession to our knowledge supplies fresh means, with which we can either control the operations of nature or, failing in that, can foresee the consequences, and thus avoid what it is impossible to prevent; in both instances, diminishing the pressure exercised on us by external agents.

If these premises are admitted, we are led to a conclusion which is of great value for the purpose of this Introduction. For if the measure of civilization is the triumph of the mind over external agents, it becomes clear that of the two classes of laws which regulate the progress of mankind, the mental class is more important than the physical. This, indeed, is assumed by one school of thinkers as a matter of course, though I am not aware that its demonstration has been hitherto attempted by anything even approaching an exhaustive analysis. The question, however, as to the originality of my arguments, is one of very trifling moment; but what we have to notice is that in the present stage of our inquiry, the problem with which we started has become simplified, and a discovery of the laws of European history is resolved, in the first instance, into a discovery of the laws of the human mind. These mental laws, when ascertained, will be the ultimate basis of the history of Europe; the physical laws will be treated as of minor importance, and as merely giving rise to disturbances, the force and the frequency of which have, during several centuries, perceptibly diminished. . . .

*The Causes of European Progress.* Whatever the moral and intellectual progress of men may be, it resolves itself not into a progress of natural capacity, but into a progress, if I may so say, of opportunity; that is, an improvement in the circumstances under which that capacity after birth comes into play. Here, then, lies the gist of the whole matter. The progress is one, not of internal power, but of external advantage. The child born in a civilized land is not likely, as such, to be superior to one born among barbarians; and the difference which ensures between the acts of the two children will be caused, so far as we know, solely by the pressure of external circumstances; by which I mean the surrounding opinions, knowledge associations, in a word, the entire mental atmosphere in which the two children are respectively nurtured.

On this account it is evident that if we look at mankind in the aggregate, their moral and intellectual condition is regulated by the moral and intellectual notions prevalent in their own time. There are, of course, many persons who will rise above these notions, and many others who will sink below them. But such cases are exceptional, and form a very small pro-

portion of the total amount of those who are nowise remarkable either for good or for evil. An immense majority of men must always remain in a middle state, neither very foolish nor very able, neither very virtuous nor very vicious, but slumbering on in a peaceful and decent mediocrity, adopting without much difficulty the current opinions of the day, making no inquiry, exciting no scandal, causing no wonder, just holding themselves on a level with their generation, and noiselessly conforming to the standard of morals and of knowledge common to the age and country in which they live.

Now, it requires but a superficial acquaintance with history to be aware that this standard is constantly changing, and that it is never precisely the same even in the most similar countries, or in two successive generations in the same country. The opinions which are popular in any nation vary in many respects almost from year to year; and what in one period is attacked as a paradox or a heresy is in another period welcomed as a sober truth; which, however, in its turn is replaced by some subsequent novelty. This extreme mutability in the ordinary standard of human actions shows that the conditions on which the standard depends must themselves be very mutable; and those conditions, whatever they may be, are evidently the originators of the moral and intellectual conduct of the great average of mankind.

Herc, then, we have a basis on which we can safely proceed. We know that the main cause of human actions is extremely variable; we have only, therefore, to apply this test to any set of circumstances which are supposed to be the cause, and if we find that such circumstances are not very variable, we must infer that they are not the cause we are attempting to discover.

Applying this test to moral motives, or to the dictates of what is called moral instinct, we shall at once see how extremely small is the influence those motives have exercised over the progress of civilization. For there is, unquestionably, nothing to be found in the world which has undergone so little change as those great dogmas of which moral systems are composed. To do good to others; to sacrifice for their benefit your own wishes; to love your neighbor as yourself; to forgive your enemies; to restrain your passions; to honor your parents; to respect those who are set over you: these, and a few others, are the sole essentials of morals; but they have been known for thousands of years, and not one jot or tittle has been added to them by all the sermons, homilies, and textbooks which moralists and theologians have been able to produce.\*

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\*That the system of morals propounded in the New Testament contained no maxim which had not been previously enunciated, and that some of the most beautiful passages in the Apostolic writings are quotations from Pagan authors is well known to every scholar; and so far from supplying, as some suppose, an objection against Christianity, it is a strong recommendation of it, as indicating the intimate relation between the doctrines of Christ and the moral sympathies of mankind in different ages. But to assert that Christianity communicated to man moral truths previously unknown, argues, on the part of the assertor, either gross ignorance or else wilful fraud. . . .

But if we contrast this stationary aspect of moral truths with the progressive aspect of intellectual truths, the difference is indeed startling. All the great moral systems which have exercised much influence have been fundamentally the same; all the great intellectual systems have been fundamentally different. In reference to our moral conduct, there is not a single principle now known to the most cultivated Europeans, which was not likewise known to the ancients. In reference to the conduct of our intellect, the moderns have not only made the most important additions to every department of knowledge that the ancients ever attempted to study, but besides this, they have upset and revolutionized the old methods of inquiry; they have consolidated into one great scheme all those resources of induction which Aristotle alone dimly perceived; and they have created sciences, the faintest idea of which never entered the mind of the boldest thinker antiquity ever produced.

These are, to every educated man, recognized and notorious facts; and the inference to be drawn from them is immediately obvious. Since civilization is the product of moral and intellectual agencies, and since that product is constantly changing, it evidently cannot be regulated by the stationary agent; because, when surrounding circumstances are unchanged, a stationary agent can only produce a stationary effect. The only other agent is the intellectual one; and that this is the real mover may be proved in two distinct ways: first, because being, as we have already seen, either moral or intellectual, and being, as we have also seen, not moral, it must be intellectual; and secondly, because the intellectual principle has an activity and a capacity for adaptation which, as I undertake to show, is quite sufficient to account for the extraordinary progress that, during several centuries, Europe has continued to make.

## MARX (1818-1883)

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KARL HEINRICH MARX was born in 1818 at Trier, in the German Rhineland, the son of a lawyer. At the age of seventeen he became a student of law in the University of Bonn, transferring to the University of Berlin a year later, where the dominant Hegelian philosophy exercised a profound influence upon his mind and eventually led him to give up law for philosophy. With the death of his father, he was forced to find an occupation and was for a time a journalist editing the radical *Rheinische Zeitung*, which was suppressed by the government in 1843. In the same year Marx went to Paris, where the impact of French and English thought led him to re-exam-

inc the metaphysical presuppositions of the Hegelian philosophy; it was here that his own views about the nature of society and history finally took shape. In 1844 he met Friedrich Engels, and the collaboration of these two men in developing a systematic social and economic theory was to continue until Marx's death in 1883.

Different aspects of Marx's view of history are to be found in a number of works, including *The German Ideology* (1845-46), *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), and his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). In the light of what is sometimes supposed, it is important to recognize the influence upon Marx's historical thought of writers other than Hegel: in particular, the influence of Feuerbach, who argued, amongst other things, that many of the ideologies men create and believe in are explicable by reference to the material conditions in which they find themselves, and of Saint-Simon, who attributed great significance to economic relationships and class-conflicts as determinants of historical change. Thus, although Marx was indebted to Hegel in a number of respects for his interpretation of history, the differences are as impressive as the similarities. The view of history as a dynamic, progressive movement, the portrayal of historical development as proceeding according to dialectical "laws," the "necessary" emergence of different stages of the historical process in terms of which the events of history must ultimately be understood—these are all Hegelian ideas. But his underlying revolutionary aim is discernible in every aspect of Marx's thought about history, and this led him to put the conception of historical determinism to a use radically different from that to which Hegel put it; the moral to be drawn from Marx's conception of history is not the need to accept what necessarily is (as Hegel implies), but the need to hasten what necessarily will be. And if Marx was in many respects as aware as Hegel was of the ways in which human values and modes of expression vary from age to age, this did not lead him into talking of the operation of mysterious "principles" or "spirits." There is a strong positivist element in Marx's thought which makes him reject metaphysical conceptions and turn instead to the hard and concrete facts of life and experience.

It is possible to assess Marx's theory apart from the prophetic and propagandist purposes to which it was put. Regarded as an attempt to provide a single, all-embracing explanation of historical development and change, "historical materialism" is no doubt an unsatisfactory doctrine, open to criticism on logical as well as on factual grounds, yet some of the ideas it contained, suggesting a radically new approach towards the interpretation of historical and social phenomena, proved to be of great methodological importance. By stressing the relevance to historical explanation of technical and economic factors in the particular way he did, Marx in effect redrew the map of history. In doing so he made it difficult for historians ever to look at their subject in quite the same fashion as they had done before; this is surely the mark of a considerable and original thinker.

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## 1. The Materialist Conception of History\*

*The Real Basis of History.* Hegel's conception of history presupposes an *abstract* or *absolute spirit* which develops in such a way that humanity is nothing but a *mass* which more or less consciously bears it along. Within the framework of *empirical*, *exoteric* history, Hegel introduces the operation of a *speculative*, *esoteric* history. The history of humanity becomes the history of the *abstract spirit* of humanity, a *spirit above and beyond* the real man.\*\*

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions of life, including those which they find already in existence and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be established in a purely empirical way.

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. The first fact to be established, therefore, is the physical constitution of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of Nature. Of course we cannot here investigate the actual physical nature of man or the natural conditions in which man finds himself—geological, oro-hydrographical, climatic and so on. All historiography must begin from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history by men's activity.

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or by anything one likes. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is determined by their physical constitution. In producing their means of subsistence men indirectly produce their actual material life.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends in the first place on the nature of the existing means which they have to reproduce. This mode of production should not be regarded simply as the reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. It is already a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite way of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life*. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce it. What individuals are, therefore, depends on the material conditions of their production. . . .

This conception of history, therefore, rests on the exposition of the real process of production, starting out from the simple material production of life, and on the comprehension of the form of intercourse connected

\*All passages in this selection are taken from *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, edited by T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel. The translations are by T. B. Bottomore. They are reprinted here with the kind permission of Watts & Co., London. Except where specially indicated, the extracts are from *The German Ideology*.

\*\*This paragraph is from *The Holy Family* (1845).

with and created by this mode of production, i.e. of civil society in its various stages as the basis of all history, and also in its action as the State. From this starting point, it explains all the different theoretical productions and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., and traces their origins and growth, by which means the matter can of course be displayed as a whole (and consequently, also the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another). Unlike the idealist view of history, it does not have to look for a category in each period, but remains constantly on the real ground of history; it does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice, and accordingly comes to the conclusion that all the forms of and products of consciousness can be dissolved, not by intellectual criticism, not by resolution into "self-consciousness," or by transformation into "apparitions," "spectres," "fancies," etc., but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealist humbug; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, as well as of religion, philosophy, and all other types of theory. It shows that history does not end by being resolved into "self-consciousness," as "spirit of the spirit," but that at each stage of history there is found a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to Nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessors, a mass of productive forces, capital, and circumstances, which is indeed modified by the new generation but which also prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a special character. It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances. . . .

The whole previous conception of history has either completely neglected this real basis of history or else has considered it a secondary matter without any connection with the course of history. Consequently, history has always to be written in accordance with an external standard; the real production of life appears as ahistorical, while what is historical appears as separated from ordinary life, as supraterrrestrial. Thus the relation of man to Nature is excluded from history and in this way the antithesis between Nature and history is established. The exponents of this conception of history have consequently only been able to see in history the political action of princes and States, religious and all sorts of theoretical struggles, and in particular have been obliged to share in each historical epoch the *illusion of that epoch*. For instance, if an epoch imagines itself to be actuated by purely "political" or "religious" motives, although "religion" and "politics" are only forms of its true motives, the historian accepts this opinion. The "idea," the "conception" of these conditioned men about their real practice, is transformed into the sole determining, active force, which controls and determines their practice. When the crude form in which the division of labor emerges among the Indians and the Egyptians engenders the caste system in their State and religion, the historian believes that the caste system is the power which has produced this crude social form. While the French and the English at least hold by the political illusion, which is moderately close to reality, the Germans move in the realm of "pure spirit," and make religious illusion the driving force of history.



The Hegelian philosophy of history is the last consequence, brought to its "purest expression," of all this German historiography, which is concerned, not with real, nor even with political interests, but with pure thoughts, which inevitably appear . . . as a series of "thoughts" which devour one another and are finally swallowed up in "self-consciousness." . . .

[The above passages make plain Marx's rejection of the notion that history can ultimately be explained by reference to the operation of spiritual forces, and his insistence that the key to historical development lies in the way in which men make and use tools in order to provide the means of their subsistence. It is the processes of production, and the types of organization necessary for, and appropriate to, their working, which represent the fundamental factors in social and historical development and change. It is in terms of these that other features of social life must finally be interpreted and understood—legal and political institutions, for example, or moral, religious and philosophical ideas. By making this clear, Marx believed that he had exposed the fatal misconceptions underlying all those idealist interpretations and theories against which he had so resolutely set his face. For, as the following extracts illustrate, Marx thinks that the political, moral, religious and philosophical conceptions and speculations of men at any period of their history are significant only insofar as they are regarded as reflecting the fundamental facts of material production and the conflicts between different economic interests to which developments in the productive techniques give rise. To suppose that they could be regarded as independent forces in history was a mistake; to raise theoretical questions about their truth or validity was beside the point. Thus Marx believed that his diagnosis of their nature, as expressions of "real interests" working beneath the surface, had profound implications for historical method, which had previously worked on very different assumptions.]

*Ideological Reflexes of the Material Life-Process.* The production of ideas, conceptions and consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Representation and thought, the mental intercourse of men, still appear at this stage as the direct emanation of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as it is expressed in the political, legal, moral, religious and metaphysical language of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.,—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a determinate development of their productive forces, and of the intercourse which corresponds to these, up to its most extensive forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises from their historical life process just as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven

to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, or conceive, nor from what has been said, thought, imagined, or conceived of men, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We begin with real, active men, and from their real life process show the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms of the human brain also are necessary sublimates of men's material life-process, which can be empirically established and which is bound to material preconditions. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and other ideologies, and their corresponding forms of consciousness, no longer retain therefore their appearance of autonomous existence. They have no history, no development; it is men, who, in developing their material production and their material intercourse, change, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. Those who adopt the first method of approach begin with consciousness, regarded as the living individual; those who adopt the second, which corresponds with real life, begin with the real living individuals themselves, and consider consciousness only as *their* consciousness.

This method of approach is not without presuppositions, but it begins with the real presuppositions and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in some imaginary condition of fulfilment or stability, but in their actual, empirically observable process of development under determinate conditions. As soon as this active life-process is delineated, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an illusory activity of illusory subjects, as with the idealists. . . .

The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the dominant *material* force in society is at the same time its dominant *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it. The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, and thus of the relationships which make one class the ruling one; they are consequently the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the whole extent of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range and thus, among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently their ideas are the ruling ideas of the age. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and the bourgeoisie are contending for domination and where, therefore, domination is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers appears as the dominant idea and is enunciated as an "eternal law". The division of labor, which we saw earlier as one of the principal forces of history up to the present time, manifests itself also in the ruling class, as the division of mental and mate-

rial labor, so that within this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active conceptualizing ideologists, who make it their chief source of livelihood to develop and perfect the illusions of the class about itself), while the others have a more passive and receptive attitude to these ideas and illusions, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up ideas and illusions about themselves. This cleavage within the ruling class may even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, but in the event of a practical collision in which the class itself is endangered, it disappears of its own accord and with it also the illusion that the ruling ideas were not the ideas of the ruling class and had a power distinct from the power of this class. The existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular age presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class. . .

If, in considering the course of history, we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that in a particular age these or those ideas were dominant, without paying attention to the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, and if we thus ignore the individuals and the world conditions which are the source of the ideas, it is possible to say, for instance, that during the time that the aristocracy was dominant the concepts honor, loyalty, etc., were dominant; during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. The ruling class itself in general imagines this to be the case. This conception of history which is common to all historians, particularly since the eighteenth century, will necessarily come up against the phenomenon that increasingly abstract ideas hold sway, i.e. ideas which increasingly take on the form of universality. For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, simply in order to achieve its aims, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, i.e. employing an ideal formula, to give its ideas the form of universality and to represent them as the only rational and universally valid ones. The class which makes a revolution appears from the beginning not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society, simply because it is opposed to a *class*. It appears as the whole mass of society confronting the single ruling class. It can do this because at the beginning its interest really is more closely connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes and has been unable under the constraint of the previously existing conditions to develop as the particular interest of a particular class. Its victory, therefore, also benefits many individuals of the other classes which are not achieving a dominant position, but only in so far as it now puts these individuals in a position to raise themselves into the ruling class. When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the rule of the aristocracy it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only in so far as they became bourgeois. Every new class, therefore, achieves, its domination only on a broader basis than that of the previous ruling class. On the other hand, the opposition of the non-ruling class to the new ruling class later develops

all the more sharply and profoundly. These two characteristics entail that the struggle to be waged against this new ruling class has as its object a more decisive and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could have been accomplished by all previous classes which aspired to rule.

*Historical Development and the Material Forces of Production.\** I was led by my studies to the conclusion that legal relations as well as forms of State could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of life, which are summed up by Hegel after the fashion of the English and French writers of the eighteenth century under the name civil society, and that the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. The study of the latter which I had begun in Paris, I continued in Brussels where I had emigrated on account of an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, continued to serve as the guiding thread in my studies, may be formulated briefly as follows: In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical—in short ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of produc-

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\*The extract which follows is Marx's Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

tion. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, on closer examination, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outline we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production as progressive epochs on the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production; not in the sense of individual antagonisms, but of conflict arising from conditions surrounding the life of individuals in society. At the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society comes to an end.

[This famous passage is perhaps as remarkable for its obscurity as for its compression. As is often pointed out, it is not clear what precisely Marx meant by the phrase "relations of production," and the vagueness attaching to this expression makes it difficult to understand the exact implications of his thesis that at certain crucial stages of history the material forces of production come into conflict with the existing relations of production, which have become their "fetters." It is imprecisions of this kind that have led Marx's critics to question the claim that his theory was of a scientific character, or that the "laws" it embodies are genuinely empirical laws, susceptible to confirmation or falsification by observation and experience.]

## 2. The Inevitable Victory of the Proletariat\*

[Marx believed that his theory made it possible to predict with assurance the next—Communist—stage in the development of society, an assurance which he regarded as partly justifying the revolutionary

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\*This selection is from the *Communist Manifesto*, a pamphlet written by Marx in conjunction with Engels. The text used here is that found in *Karl Marx: Selected Works*, edited by V. Adoratsky and published by Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., London, with whose kind permission it is reproduced.

program he advocated. This application of his theory is elaborated in the selection which follows.]

...Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time, or by increased speed of the machinery, etc.

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the work people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bour-

geois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages.

At this stage the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie. Thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.

But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (trades unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition



between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten-hours' bill in England was carried.

Altogether, collisions between the classes of the old society further in many ways the course of development of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

Further, as we have already seen, entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence. These also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress.

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests; they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat.

The "dangerous class," the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

In the conditions of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.

In depicting the most general phase of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.

Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him.

Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The essential condition for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

## PLEKHANOV (1856-1918)

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GEORGI PLEKHANOV was one of the outstanding figures in the Russian labor movement prior to the Revolution and one of the foremost theoreticians of orthodox Marxism. Both Kautsky and Lenin referred to him as the philosophically most educated intelligence of the socialist movement. From about 1890 onward he exerted a very great influence on the Russian intelligentsia, and socialist organizations recognized the ideological leadership of his Group for the Emancipation of Labor. In 1901 he joined the editorial board of the newspaper *Iskra* ("The Spark"), which was founded by Lenin and which became the official organ of the Russian Social Democratic Party. He was also the joint author with Lenin of the party's program which was adopted in 1903. In subsequent years, however, Plekhanov broke with the majority of the Bolshevik group, bitterly criticizing their theory and tactics. He returned to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917 and died shortly after the Bolsheviks came to power.

Plekhanov's remarkable essay on *The Role of the Individual in History* was published in 1898. His discussion is perhaps more noteworthy for the questions it raises and the interesting historical illustrations that are provided than for the answers it contains. Plekhanov emphasizes that Marxism is compatible with the admission that "great men" play a significant part in historical development. But the great man's effectiveness, he insists, depends on the social setting, on the major social forces operative at his time. Unfortunately, he becomes evasive when dealing with the further

question of what accounts for the very existence of great men. In the end, as Sidney Hook† has pointed out Plekhanov seems committed to the position that the social forces of a given period produce and not merely "select" the great men, and it is doubtful whether any less extreme view would be consistent with the monistic character of historical materialism.

Other of Plekhanov's works available in English are *Art and Society* (New York, 1937), *Art and Social Life* (London, 1953), *Anarchism and Socialism* (London, 1895), *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (New York, 1929), *Essays in the History of Materialism* (London, 1934), *In Defense of Materialism* (London, 1947), and *The Materialist Conception of History* (New York, 1940).

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## The Role of the Individual in History\*

### I

In the second half of the 'seventies the late Kablitz wrote an article "The Mind and the Senses as Factors of Progress," in which, referring to Spenceer, he argued that the senses played the principal role in human progress, and that the mind played only a secondary role, and quite a subordinate one at that. A certain "esteemed sociologist" replied to Kablitz, expressing amusement and surprise at a theory which placed the mind "on the footboard." The "esteemed sociologist" was right, of course, in defending the mind. He would have been much more right, however, had he, without going into the details of the question that Kablitz had raised, proved that his very method of presenting it was impossible and impermissible. Indeed, the "factors" theory is unsound in itself, for it arbitrarily picks out different sides of social life, hypostasizes them, converts them into forces of a special kind, which, from different sides, and with unequal success, draw the social man along the path of progress. But this theory is still less sound in the form presented by Kablitz, who converted into special sociological hypostases, not the various sides of the activities of the *social man*, but the different spheres of the *individual mind*. This is a veritable Herculean pillar of abstraction; beyond this one cannot go,

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†*The Hero in History* (New York, 1943), which contains a detailed critique of Plekhanov's essay.

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for beyond it lies the comic kingdom of utter and obvious absurdity. It is to this that the "esteemed sociologist" should have drawn the attention of Kahlitz and his readers. Perhaps, after revealing the depths of abstraction into which the effort to find the predominating "factor" in history had led Kahlitz, the "esteemed sociologist" might, by chance, have made some contribution to the critique of this "factors" theory. This would have been very useful for all of us at that time. But he proved unequal to his mission. He himself subscribed to that theory, differing from Kahlitz only in his leanings towards *eclecticism*, and, consequently, all the "factors" seemed to him to be equally important. Subsequently, the eclectic nature of his mind found particularly striking expression in his attacks on dialectical materialism, which he regarded as a doctrine which sacrifices all other factors to the economic "factor" and reduces the role of the individual in history to nothing. It never occurred to the "esteemed sociologist" that the "factors" point of view is alien to dialectical materialism, and that only one who is utterly incapable of thinking logically can see in it any justification of so-called *quietism*. Incidentally, it must be observed that the slip made by our "esteemed sociologist" is not unique; very many others have made it, are making it and, probably, will go on making it.

Materialists began to be accused of betraying leanings towards *quietism* even before they had worked out their dialectical conception of nature and of history. Without making an excursion into the "depth of time," we will recall the controversy between the celebrated English scientists, Priestley and Price. Analyzing Priestley's theories, Price argued that materialism was incompatible with the concept of free will, and that it precluded all independent activity on the part of the individual. In reply Priestley referred to everyday experience. He would not speak of himself, he said, though by no means the most apathetic of creatures, but where would one find more mental vigor, more activity, more force and persistence in the pursuit of extremely important aims, than among those who subscribe to the doctrine of necessity? Priestley had in view the religious, democratic sect then known as Christian Necessarians.<sup>1</sup> We do not know whether this sect was as active as Priestley, who belonged to it, thought it was. But that is not important. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the materialist conception of the human will is quite compatible with the most vigorous practical activity. Lanson observes that "all the doctrines which called for the utmost exertion of human will asserted, in principle, that the will was impotent; they rejected free will and subjected the world to fatalism."<sup>2</sup> Lanson was wrong in thinking that every repudiation of what is called free will leads to fatalism; but this did not prevent him from noting an extremely interesting historical fact. Indeed, history shows that even fatalism was not always a hindrance to energetic, practical action;

1. A Frenchman of the seventeenth century would have been surprised at this combination of materialism and religious dogma. In England, however, nobody thought it strange. Priestley himself was very religious. Different countries, different customs.

2. Cf. his *Histoire de la littérature française*, Vol. I.

on the contrary, in certain epochs it was a *psychologically necessary basis for such action*. In proof of this, we will point to the Puritans, who in energy excelled all the other parties in England in the seventeenth century; and to the followers of Mohammed, who in a short space of time subjugated an enormous part of the globe, stretching from India to Spain. Those who think that as soon as we are convinced of the inevitability of a certain series of events we lose all psychological possibility to help on, or counteract these events, are very much mistaken.<sup>3</sup>

Here, everything depends upon whether my activities constitute an inevitable link in the chain of inevitable events. If they do, then I waver less and the more resolute are my actions. There is nothing surprising in this: when we say that a certain individual regards his activities as an inevitable link in the chain of inevitable events, we mean, among other things, that for this individual, lack of free will is tantamount to *incapability of inaction*, and that this lack of free will is reflected in his mind as the *impossibility of acting differently from the way he is acting*. This is precisely the psychological mood that can be expressed in the celebrated words of Luther: "*Here I stand, I can do no other*," and thanks to which men display the most indomitable energy, perform the most astonishing feats. Hamlet never knew his mood; that is why he was only capable of moaning and reflecting. And that is why Hamlet would never have accepted a philosophy, according to which freedom is merely necessity transformed into mind. Fichte rightly said: "*As the man is, so is his philosophy*."

## II

Some people here have taken seriously Stammmler's remarks about the allegedly insoluble contradiction that is said to be characteristic of a certain West European social-political theory.\* We have in mind the well-known example of the eclipse of the moon. As a matter of fact, this is a supremely absurd example. The combination of conditions that are necessary to cause an eclipse of the moon does not, and cannot under any circumstances, include human action; and, for this reason alone, a party to assist the eclipse of the moon can arise only in a lunatic asylum. But even if human action did serve as one of these conditions, none of those who keenly desired to see an eclipse of the moon would, if they were convinced that it would certainly take place *without their aid*, join the eclipse of the

3. It is well known that, according to the doctrines of Calvin, all men's actions are predetermined by God: "*By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he within himself has ordained what it behoves shall happen to each man*" (*Instituto*, Book III, Ch. 5). According to the same doctrine, God chooses certain of his servants to liberate unjustly oppressed peoples. Such a one was Moses, who liberated the people of Israel. Everything goes to show that Cromwell also regarded himself as such an instrument of God; he always called his actions the fruits of the will of God, and, probably, he was quite sincerely convinced that they were so. *For him*, all these actions were colored by necessity beforehand. This did not prevent him from striving for victory after victory; it even gave this striving indomitable power.

\*Marxism. (Translator's note)

moon party. In this case, "their quietism" would merely be abstention from unnecessary, i.e., useless, action and would have no affinity with real quietism. In order that the example of the eclipse of the moon may cease to be oosensical in the case of the above-mentioned party that we are examining, it must be entirely changed. It would have to be imagined that the moon is endowed with a mind, and that her position in celestial space, which causes her eclipse, appears to her to be the fruit of the self-determination of her own will; that this position not only gives her enormous pleasure, but is absolutely necessary for her peace of mind; and that this is why she always passionately strives to occupy it.<sup>4</sup> After imagining all this, the question would have to be asked: What would the moon feel if she discovered, at last, that it is not her will, and not her "ideals," that determine her movement in celestial space, but, on the contrary, that her movement determines her will and her "ideals"? According to Stammler, such a discovery would certainly make her incapable of moving, unless she succeeded in extricating herself from her predicament by some logical contradiction. But such an assumption is totally groundless. This discovery might serve as a *formal* reason for the moon's bad temper, for feeling out of harmony with herself, for the contradiction between her "ideals" and mechanical reality. But since we are assuming that the "moon's psychological state" in *general* is, in the last analysis, determined by her movement, then the cause of her disturbed peace of mind must be sought for in her movement. If this subject were examined carefully it would have transpired, perhaps, that when the moon was at her apogee she grieved over the fact that her will was not free; and when she was at her perigee, this very circumstance served as a new, formal cause of her happiness and good spirits. Perhaps, the opposite would have happened: perhaps it would have transpired that she found the means of reconciling free will with necessity, not at her perigee, but at her apogee. Be that as it may, such a reconciliation is undoubtedly possible; being conscious of necessity is quite compatible with the most energetic, practical action. At all events, this has been the case in history so far. Men who have repudiated free will have often excelled all their contemporaries in strength of will, and asserted their will to the utmost. Numerous examples of this can be quoted. They are universally known. They can be forgotten, as Stammler evidently does, only if one deliberately refuses to see historical reality as it actually is. This attitude is strongly marked, among our subjectivists, for example, and among some German philistines. Philistines and subjectivists, however, are not men, but mere *phantoms*, as Belinsky<sup>5</sup> would have said.

Let us, however, examine more closely the case when a man's own—past, present or future—actions seem to him to be entirely colored by necessity. We know already that such a man, regarding himself as a mes-

4. "It is as if the compass needle took pleasure in turning towards the north, believing that its movement was independent of any other cause, and unaware of the imperceptible movements of magnetic matter." Leibnitz, *Théodicée*, Lausanne, 1760, p. 598.

5. V. G. Belinsky (1811-1848), renowned Russian literary critic.

senger of God, like Mohammed, as one chosen by ineluctable destiny, like Napoleon, or as the expression of the irresistible force of historical progress, like some of the public men in the nineteenth century, displays almost elemental strength of will, and sweeps from his path like a house of cards all the obstacles set up by the small-town Hamlets and Hamletkins.<sup>6</sup> But this case interests us now from another angle, namely, as follows: When the consciousness of my lack of free will presents itself to me only in the form of the complete subjective and objective impossibility of acting differently from the way I am acting, and when, at the same time, my actions are to me the most desirable of all other possible actions, then, in my mind, necessity becomes identified with freedom and freedom with necessity; and then, I am unfree only in the sense that *I cannot disturb this identity between freedom and necessity, I cannot oppose one to the other, I cannot feel the restraint of necessity. But such a lack of freedom is at the same time its fullest manifestation.*

Zimmcl says that freedom is always freedom from something, and, where freedom is not conceived as the opposite of restraint, it is meaningless. That is so, of course. But this slight, elementary truth cannot serve as a ground for refuting the thesis, which constitutes one of the most brilliant discoveries ever made by philosophic thought, that freedom means being conscious of necessity. Zimmel's definition is too narrow; it applies only to freedom from external restraint. As long as we are discussing only such restraints it would be extremely ridiculous to identify freedom with necessity: a pick-pocket is not free to steal your pocket-handkerchief while you are preventing him from doing so and until he has overcome your resistance in one way or another. In addition to this elementary and superficial conception of freedom, however, there is another, incomparably more profound. For those who are incapable of thinking philosophically this concept does not exist at all; and those who are capable of thinking philosophically grasp it only when they have cast off dualism and realize that, contrary to the assumption of the dualists, there is no gulf between the subject and the object.

The Russian subjectivist opposes his utopian ideals to our capitalist reality and goes no further. The subjectivists have stuck in the bog of *dualism*. The ideals of the so-called Russian "disciples"<sup>7</sup> resemble capitalist reality far less than the ideals of the subjectivists. Notwithstanding this, however, the "disciples" have found a bridge which unites ideals with

6. We will quote another example, which vividly illustrates how strongly people of this category feel. In a letter to her teacher, Calvin Renée, Duchess of Ferrara (of the house of Louis XII) wrote as follows: "No, I have not forgotten what you wrote to me: that David bore mortal hatred towards the enemies of God. And I will never act differently, for if I knew that the King, my father, the Queen, my mother, the late lord, my husband (*feu monsieur mon mari*) and all my children had been cast out by God, I would hate them with a mortal hatred and would wish them in Hell," etc. What terrible, all-destroying energy the people who felt like this could display! And yet these people denied that there was such a thing as free will.

<sup>7</sup>The Marxists. (Translator's note)



reality. The "disciples" have elevated themselves to *monism*. In their opinion, capitalism, in the course of its development, will lead to its own negation and to the realization of their, the Russian "disciples"—and not only the Russian—ideals. This is *historical necessity*. The "disciple" serves as an instrument of this necessity and cannot help doing so, owing to his social status and to his mentality and temperament, which were created by his status. This, too, is an *aspect of necessity*. Since his social status has imbued him with this character and no other, he not only serves as an instrument of necessity and cannot help doing so, but he *passionately desires, and cannot help desiring*, to do so. This is an *aspect of freedom*, and, moreover, of freedom that has grown out of necessity, i.e., to put it more correctly, it is freedom that is identical with necessity—it is necessity transformed into freedom.<sup>7</sup> This freedom is also freedom from a certain amount of restraint; it is also the antithesis of a certain amount of restriction. Profound definitions do not refute superficial ones, but, supplementing them, include them in themselves. But what sort of restraint, what sort of restriction, is in question in this case? This is clear: the moral restraint which curbs the energy of those who have not cast off dualism; the restriction suffered by those who are unable to bridge the gulf between ideals and reality. Until the individual has won *this* freedom by heroic effort in philosophical thinking he does not fully belong to himself, and his mental tortures are the shameful tribute he pays to external necessity that stands opposed to him. But as soon as this individual throws off the yoke of this painful and shameful restriction he is born for a new, full and hitherto never experienced life; and his *free* actions become the *conscious and free* expression of necessity. Then he will become a great social force; and then nothing can, and nothing will, prevent him from

Bursting on cunning falsehood  
Like a storm of wrath divine...

### III

Again, being conscious of the absolute inevitability of a given phenomenon can only increase the energy of a man who sympathizes with it and who regards himself as one of the forces which called it into being. If such a man, conscious of the inevitability of this phenomenon, folded his arms and did nothing, he would show that he was ignorant of arithmetic. Indeed, let us suppose that phenomenon A must necessarily take place under a given sum of circumstances. You have proved to me that a part of this sum of circumstances already exists and that the other part will exist in a given time, T. Being convinced of this, I, the man who sympathizes with phenomenon A, exclaim: "Good!" and then go to sleep until the happy day when the event you have foretold takes place. What will

7. "Necessity becomes freedom, not by disappearing, but only by the external expression of their inner identity." Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Nurnberg, 1816.

be the result? The following. In your calculations, the sum of circumstances, necessary to bring about phenomenon A, included *my activities*, equal, let us say to  $a$ . As, however, I am immersed in deep slumber, the sum of circumstances favorable for the given phenomenon at time T will be, not S, but  $S-a$ , which changes the situation. Perhaps my place will be taken by another man, who was also on the point of inaction, but was saved by the sight of my apathy, which to him appeared to be pernicious. In that case, force  $a$  will be replaced by force  $b$ , and if  $a$  equals  $b$  ( $a = b$ ), the sum of circumstances favorable for A will remain equal to S, and phenomenon A will take place, after all, at time T.

But if my force cannot be regarded as being equal to zero, if I am a skilful and capable worker, and nobody has replaced me, then we will not have the full sum S, and phenomenon A will take place later than we assumed, or not as fully as we expected, or it may not take place at all. This is as clear as daylight; and if I do not understand it, if I think that S remains S even after I am replaced, it is only because I am unable to count. But am I the only one who is unable to count? You, who prophesied that the sum S would certainly be available at time T, did not foresee that I would go to sleep immediately after my conversation with you; you were convinced that I would remain a good worker to the end; the force was less reliable than you thought. Hence, you, too, counted badly. But let us suppose that you had made no mistake, that you had made allowance for everything. In that case, your calculations will assume the following form: you say that at time T the sum S will be available. This sum of circumstances will include my replacement as a *negative magnitude*; and it will also include, as a *positive magnitude*, the stimulating effect on strong-minded men of the conviction that their strivings and ideals are the subjective expression of objective necessity. In that case, the sum S will indeed be available at the time you appointed, and phenomenon A will take place. I think this is clear. But if this is clear, why was I confused by the idea that phenomenon A was inevitable? Why did it seem to me that it condemned me to inaction? Why, in discussing it, did I forget the simplest rules of arithmetic? Probably because, owing to the circumstances of my upbringing. I already had a very strong leaning towards inaction and my conversation with you served as the drop which filled the cup of this laudable inclination to overflowing. That is all. *Only in this sense—as the cause that revealed my moral flabbiness and uselessness—did the consciousness of necessity figure here.* It cannot possibly be regarded as the *cause* of this flabbiness: the causes of it are the circumstances of my upbringing. And so . . . and so—arithmetic is a very respectable and useful science, the rules of which should not be forgotten even by—I would say, particularly by—philosophers.

But what effect will the consciousness of the necessity of a given phenomenon have upon a strong man who does not *sympathize* with it and *resists* its taking place? Here the situation is somewhat different. It is very possible that it will cause the vigor of his resistance to *relax*. But when do the opponents of a given phenomenon become convinced that it is inev-

itable? When the circumstances favorable to it are very numerous and very strong. The fact that its opponents realize that the phenomenon is inevitable, and the relaxation of their energy are merely manifestations of the force of circumstances favorable to it. These manifestations, in their turn, are a part of the favorable circumstances.

But the vigor of resistance will not be relaxed among all the opponents; among some of them the consciousness that the phenomenon is inevitable will cause it to grow and become transformed into the vigor of *despair*. History in general, and the history of Russia in particular, provides not a few instructive examples of this sort of vigor. We hope the reader will be able to recall these without our assistance.

Here we are interrupted by Mr. Karcyev,<sup>8</sup> who, while, of course, disagreeing with our views on freedom and necessity, and, moreover disapproving of our partiality for the "extremes" to which strong men go, nevertheless, is pleased to meet in the pages of our journal the idea that the individual may be a great social force. The worthy professor joyfully exclaims: "I have always said that!" And this is true. Mr. Karcyev, and all the subjectivists, have always ascribed a very important role to the individual in history. And there was a time when they enjoyed considerable sympathy among advanced young people who were imbued with noble strivings to work for the common weal and were, therefore, naturally inclined to attach great importance to individual initiative. In essence, however, the subjectivists have never been able to solve, or even to present properly, the problem of the role of the individual in history. As against the influence of the laws of social-historical progress, they advanced the "activities of critically thinking individuals," and thus created, as it were, a new species of the factors theory; critically thinking individuals were one factor of this progress; its own laws were the other factor. This resulted in an extreme incongruity, which one could put up with as long as the attention of the active "individuals" was concentrated on the practical problems of the day and they had no time to devote to philosophical problems. But the calm which ensued in the 'eighties gave those who were capable of thinking enforced leisure for philosophical reflection, and since then the subjectivist doctrine has been bursting at all its seams, and even falling to pieces, like the celebrated overcoat of Akakii Akakievich. No amount of patching was of any use, and one after another thinking people began to reject subjectivism as an obviously and utterly unsound doctrine. As always happens in such cases, however, the reaction against this doctrine caused some of its opponents to go to the opposite extreme. While some subjectivists, striving to ascribe the widest possible role to the "individual" in history, refused to recognize the historical progress of mankind as a process expressing laws, some of their later opponents, striving to bring out more sharply the coherent character of this progress, were evidently prepared to forget that *men make history, and, therefore, the activities of individuals cannot help being important in history*. They

8. N. I. Kareyev, born 1850, formerly professor of history at St. Petersburg University.

have declared the individual to be a *quantité négligeable*. In theory, this extreme is as impermissible as the one reached by the more ardent subjectivists. It is as unsound to sacrifice the *thesis* to the *antithesis* as to forget the *antithesis* for the sake of the *thesis*. The correct point of view will be found only when we succeed in uniting the points of truth contained in them into a *synthesis*.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV

This problem has been interesting us for a long time, and we have long wanted to invite our readers to join us in tackling it. We were restrained, however, by certain fears: we thought that perhaps our readers had already solved it for themselves and that our proposal would be belated. These fears have now been dispelled. The German historians have dispelled them for us. We are quite serious in saying this. The fact of the matter is that lately a rather heated controversy has been going on among the German historians over great men in history. Some have been inclined to regard the political activities of these men as the main and almost the *only* spring of historical development, while others have been asserting that such a view is one-sided and that the science of history must have in view, not only the activities of great men, and not only political history, but historical life as a whole (*das Ganze des geschichtlichen Lebens*). One of the representatives of the latter trend is Karl Lamprecht, author of *The History of the German People*. Lamprecht's opponents accused him of being a "collectivist" and a materialist; he was even placed on a par with—*horribile dictu*—the "Social-Democratic atheists," as he expressed it in winding up the debate. When we became acquainted with his views we found that the accusations hurled against this poor savant were utterly groundless. At the same time we were convinced that the present-day German historians were incapable of solving the problem of the role of the individual in history. We then decided that we had a right to assume that the problem was still unsolved even for a number of Russian readers, and that something could still be said about it that would not be altogether lacking in theoretical and practical interest.

Lamprecht gathered a whole collection (*eine artige Sammlung*, as he expresses it) of the views of prominent statesmen on their own activities in the historical milieu in which they pursued them; in his polemics, however, he confined himself for the time being to references to some of the speeches and opinions of *Bismarck*. He quoted the following words, uttered by the Iron Chancellor in the North German Reichstag on April 16, 1869:

Gentlemen, we can neither ignore the history of the past nor create the future. I would like to warn you against the mistake that causes people to advance the hands of their clocks, thinking that thereby they are hastening the passage of time.

9. In our striving for a synthesis, we were forestalled by the same Mr. Kareyev. Unfortunately, however, he went no farther than to admit the truism that man consists of a soul and a body.

My influence on the events I took advantage of is usually exaggerated; but it would never occur to anyone to demand that *I should make history*. I could not do that even in conjunction with you, although together, we could resist the whole world. We cannot make history: we must wait while it is being made. We will not make fruit ripen more quickly by subjecting it to the heat of a lamp; and if we pluck the fruit before it is ripe we will only prevent its growth and spoil it.

Referring to the evidence of Joly, Lamprecht also quotes the opinions which Bismarck expressed more than once during the Franco-Prussian war. Again, the idea that runs through these opinions is that "we cannot make great historical events, but must adapt ourselves to the natural course of things and limit ourselves to securing what is already ripe." Lamprecht regards this as the profound and whole truth. In his opinion, a modern historian cannot think otherwise, provided he is able to peer into the depths of events and not restrict his field of vision to too short an interval of time. Could Bismarck have caused Germany to revert to natural economy? He would have been unable to do this even when he was at the height of his power. General historical circumstances are stronger than the strongest individuals. For a great man, the general character of his epoch is "*empirically given necessity*."

This is how Lamprecht reasons, calling his view a *universal* one. It is not difficult to see the weak side of this "universal" view. The above-quoted opinions of Bismarck are very interesting as a psychological document. One may not sympathize with the activities of the late German Chancellor, but one cannot say that they were insignificant, that Bismarck was distinguished for "quietism." It was about him that Lasalle said: "The servants of reaction are no orators; but God grant that progress has servants like them." And yet this man, who at times displayed truly iron energy, considered himself absolutely impotent in face of the natural course of things, evidently regarding himself as a simple instrument of historical development; this proves once again that one can see phenomena in the light of necessity and at the same time be a very energetic statesman. But it is only in this respect that Bismarck's opinions are interesting; they cannot be regarded as a solution of the problem of the role of the individual in history. According to Bismarck, events occur of themselves, and we can secure what they prepare for us. But every act of "securing" is also an historical event; what is the difference between such events and those that occur of themselves? Actually, nearly every historical event is simultaneously an act of "securing" by somebody of the already ripened fruit of preceding development and a link in the chain of events which are preparing the fruits of the future. How can acts of "securing" be opposed to the natural course of things? Evidently, Bismarck wanted to say that individuals and groups of individuals operating history never were and never will be all-powerful. This, of course, is beyond all doubt. Nevertheless, we would like to know what their power, far from omnipotence, of course, depends on; under what circumstances it grows and under what circumstances it diminishes. Neither Bismarck nor the learned advocates

of the "universal" conception of history who quotes him answers these questions.

It is true that Lamprecht gives us more reasonable quotations.<sup>10</sup> For example, he quotes the following words of Monod, one of the most prominent representatives of contemporary historical science in France:

Historians are too much in the habit of paying attention only to the brilliant, clamorous and ephemeral manifestations of human activity, to great events and great men, (instead of depicting the great and slow changes of economic conditions and social institutions, which constitute the really interesting and intransient part of human development)—the part which, to a certain extent, may be reduced to laws and subjected, to a certain extent, to exact analysis. Indeed, important events and individuals are important precisely as signs and symbols of different moments of the aforesaid development. But most of the events that are called historical have the same relation to real history as the waves which rise up from the surface of the sea, gleam in the light for a moment and break on the sandy shore, leaving no trace behind them, have to the deep and constant motion of the tides.

Lamprecht declares that he is prepared to put his signature to every one of these words. It is well known that German savants are reluctant to agree with French savants and the French are reluctant to agree with the German. That is why the Belgian historian Pirenne was particularly pleased to emphasize in *Revue Historique* the fact that Monod's conception of history coincides with that of Lamprecht. "This harmony is extremely significant," he observed. "Evidently, it shows that the future belongs to the new conception of history."

## V

We do not share Pirenne's pleasant expectations. The future cannot belong to vague and indefinite views, and such, precisely, are the views of Monod and particularly of Lamprecht. Of course, one cannot but welcome a trend which declares that the most important task of the science of history is to study social institutions and economic conditions. This science will make great progress when such a trend becomes definitely consolidated. In the first place, however, Pirenne is wrong in thinking that this is a new trend. It arose in the science of history as far back as the twenties of the nineteenth century: Guizot, Mignet, Augustin Thierry and, subsequently, Tocqueville and others, were its brilliant and consistent representatives. The views of Monod and Lamprecht are but a faint copy of an old but excellent original. Secondly, profound as the views of Guizot, Mignet and the other French historians may have been for their time, much in them has remained unelucidated. They do not provide a full and definite solution of the problem of the role of the individual in history.

10. Leaving aside Lamprecht's other philosophical and historical essays, we refer to his essay, "Der Ausgang des geschichtswissenschaftlichen Kampfes," *Die Zukunft*, 1897, No. 41.

And the science of history must provide this solution if its representatives are destined to rid themselves of their one-sided conception of their subject. The future belongs to the school that finds the best solution of this problem, among others.

The views of Guizot, Mignet and the other historians who belonged to this trend were a reaction against the views on history that prevailed in the eighteenth century and constituted their *antithesis*. In the eighteenth century the students of the philosophy of history reduced everything to the *conscious activities of individuals*. True, there were exceptions to the rule even at that time: the philosophical-historical field of vision of Vico, Montesquieu and Herder, for example, was much wider. But we are not speaking of exceptions; the great majority of the thinkers of the eighteenth century regarded history exactly in the way we have described. In this connection it is very interesting to peruse once again the historical works of Mably, for example. According to Mably, Minos created the whole of the social and political life and ethics of the Cretes, while Lycurgus performed the same service for Sparta. If the Spartans "spurned" material wealth, it was due entirely to Lycurgus, who "descended, so to speak, into the depths of the hearts of his fellow-citizens and there crushed the germ of love for wealth" (*descendit pour ainsi dire jusque dans le fond du cœur des citoyens*, etc.).<sup>11</sup> And if, subsequently, the Spartans strayed from the path the wise Lycurgus had pointed out to them, the blame for this rests on Lysander, who persuaded them that "new times and new conditions called for new rules and a new policy."<sup>12</sup> Researches written from the point of view of such conceptions have very little affinity with science, and were written as sermons solely for the sake of the moral "lessons" that could be drawn from them. It was against such conceptions that the French historians of the period of the Restoration revolted. After the stupendous events of the end of the eighteenth century it was absolutely impossible to think any longer that history was made by more or less prominent and more or less noble and enlightened individuals who, at their own discretion, imbued the unenlightened but obedient masses with certain sentiments and ideas. Moreover, this philosophy of history offended the plebeian pride of the bourgeois theoreticians. They were prompted by the same feelings that revealed themselves in the eighteenth century in the rise of bourgeois drama. In combating the old conceptions of history, Thierry used the same arguments that were advanced by Beaumarchais and others against the old aesthetics.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the storms which France had just experienced very clearly revealed that the course of historical events was by no means determined solely by the conscious actions of men; this circumstance alone was enough to suggest the idea that these events were due to the influence of some hidden necessity, operating blindly, like the elemental forces of nature,

11. *Oeuvres Complètes de l'abbé de Mably*, London, 1783 (Vol. IV), pp. 3, 14-22, 24, 192.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

13. Compare his first letter on *l'Histoire de France* with *l'Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux* in the first volume of *Oeuvres complètes de Beaumarchais*.

but in accordance with certain immutable laws. It is an extremely remarkable fact, which nobody, as far as we know, has pointed to before, that the French historians of the period of the Restoration applied the new conception of history as a process conforming to laws most consistently in their works on the French Revolution. This was the case, for example, in the works of Mignet. Chateaubriand called the new school of history *fatalistic*. Formulating the tasks which it set the investigator, he said:

This system demands that the historian shall describe without indignation the most brutal atrocities, speak without love about the highest virtues and with his glacial eye see in social life only the manifestation of irresistible laws due to which every phenomenon occurs exactly as it inevitably had to occur.<sup>14</sup>

This is wrong, of course. The new school did not demand that the historian should be impassive. Augustin Thierry even said quite openly that political passion, by sharpening the mind of the investigator, may serve as a powerful means of discovering the truth.<sup>15</sup> It is sufficient to make oneself only slightly familiar with the historical works of Guizot, Thierry or Mignet to see that they strongly sympathized with the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the lords temporal and spiritual, as well as with its efforts to suppress the demands of the rising proletariat. What is incontrovertible is the following: the new school of history arose in the twenties of the nineteenth century, at a time when the bourgeoisie had already vanquished the aristocracy, although the latter was still striving to restore some of its old privileges. The proud consciousness of the victory of their class was reflected in all the arguments of the historians of the new school. And as the bourgeoisie was never distinguished for knightly chivalry, one can sometimes discern a note of harshness to the vanquished in the arguments of its scientific representatives. "*Le plus fort absorbe le plus faible*," says Guizot, in one of his polemical pamphlets, "*et il est de droit*." (The strongest absorbs the weakest, and he has a right to do so.) His attitude towards the working class is no less harsh. It was this harshness, which at times assumed the form of calm detachment, that misled Chateaubriand. Moreover, at that time it was not yet quite clear what was meant when it was said that history conformed to certain laws. Lastly, the new school may have appeared to be fatalistic because, striving firmly to adopt this point of view, it paid little attention to the great individuals in history.<sup>16</sup>

14. *Oeuvres complètes de Chateaubriand*, Paris, 1804, VII, p. 58. We also recommend the next page to the reader; one might think that it was written by Mr. N. Mikhailovsky. (Populist publicist against whom Plekhanov and Lenin wrote a great deal in defense of Marxism [Translator's note]).

15. Cf. "Considérations sur l'histoire de France," appendix to *Récits des temps Mérovingiens*, Paris, 1840, p. 72.

16. In a review of the third edition of Mignet's *History of the French Revolution*, Sainte-Beuve characterized that historian's attitude towards great men as follows: "In face of the vast and profound popular emotions which he had to describe, and of the impotence and nullity in which the sublimest genius and the saintliest virtue are reduced when the masses arise, he was seized with pity for men as individuals, could see in them, taken in isolation, only their weakness, and would not allow them to be capable of effective action, except through union with the multitude."



Those who had been brought up on the historical ideas of the eighteenth century found it difficult to accept this. Objections to the views of the new historians poured in from all sides, and then the controversy flared up, which, as we have seen, has not ended to this day.

In January, 1826, Sainte-Beuve, in a review, in the *Globe*, of the fifth and sixth volumes of Mignet's *History of the French Revolution*, wrote as follows:

At any given moment a man may, by the sudden decision of his will, introduce into the course of events a new, unexpected and changeable force, which may alter that course, but which cannot be measured itself owing to its changeability.

It must not be thought that Sainte-Beuve assumed that "sudden decisions" of human will occur without cause. No, that would have been too naïve. He merely asserted that the mental and moral qualities of a man who is playing a more or less important role in public life, his talent, knowledge, resoluteness or irresoluteness, courage or cowardice, etc., cannot help having a marked influence on the course and outcome of events; and yet these qualities cannot be explained solely by the general laws of development of a nation; they are always, and to a considerable degree, acquired as a result of the action of what may be called the accidents of private life. We will quote a few examples to explain this idea, which, incidentally, seems to me clear enough as it is.

During the War of the Austrian Succession the French army achieved several brilliant victories and it seemed that France was in a position to compel Austria to cede fairly extensive territory in what is now Belgium; but Louis XV did not claim this territory because, as he said, he was fighting as a king and not as a merchant, and France got nothing out of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. If, however, Louis XV had been a man of a different character, the territory of France would have been enlarged and as a result her economic and political development would have taken a somewhat different course.

As is well known, France waged the Seven Years' War in alliance with Austria. It is said that this alliance was concluded as a result of the strong pressure of Madame Pompadour, who had been extremely flattered by the fact that, in a letter to her, proud Maria-Theresa had called her "cousin" or "dear friend" (*bien bonne amie*). Hence, one can say that had Louis XV been a man of stricter morals, or had he submitted less to his favorite's influence, Madame Pompadour would not have been able to influence the course of events to the extent that she did, and they would have taken a different turn.

Further, France was unsuccessful in the Seven Years' War: her generals suffered several very shameful defeats. Speaking generally, their conduct was very strange, to say the least. Richelieu engaged in plunder, and Soubise and Broglie were constantly hindering each other. For example, when Broglie was attacking the enemy at Villinghausen, Soubise heard the gunfire, but did not go to his comrade's assistance, as had been

arranged, and as he undoubtedly should have done, and Broglie was obliged to retreat.<sup>17</sup> The extremely incompetent Soubise enjoyed the protection of the aforesaid Madame Pompadour. We can say again that had Louis XV been less lascivious, or had his favorite refrained from interfering in politics, events would not have turned out so unfavorably for France.

French historians say that there was no need at all for France to wage war on the European continent, and that she should have concentrated all her efforts on the sea in order to resist England's encroachments on her colonies. The fact that she acted differently was again due to the inevitable Madame Pompadour, who wanted to please "her dear friend," Maria-Theresa. As a result of the Seven Years' War, France lost her best colonies, which undoubtedly greatly influenced the development of her economic relations. In this case feminine vanity appears in the role of the influential "factor" of economic development.

Do we need any other examples? We will quote one more, perhaps the most astonishing one. During the aforesaid Seven Years' War, in August, 1761, the Austrian troops, having united with the Russian troops in Silesia, surrounded Frederick near Striegau. Frederick's position was desperate, but the Allies were tardy in attacking, and General Buturlin, after facing the enemy for twenty days, withdrew his troops from Silesia, leaving only a part of his forces as reinforcements for the Austrian General Laudon. Laudon captured Schweidnitz, near which Frederick was encamped, but this victory was of little importance. Suppose, however, Buturlin had been a man of firmer character? Suppose the Allies had attacked Frederick before he had time to entrench himself? They might have routed him, and he would have been compelled to yield to all the victors' demands. And this occurred barely a few months before a new accidental circumstance, the death of Empress Elizabeth, immediately changed the situation greatly in Frederick's favor. We would like to ask: What would have happened had Buturlin been a man of more resolute character, or had a man like Suvorov been in his place?

In examining the views of the "fatalist" historians, Sainte-Beuve gave expression to another opinion which is also worthy of attention. In the aforementioned review of Mignet's *History of the French Revolution*, he argued that the course and outcome of the French Revolution were determined, not only by the general causes which had given rise to the Revolution, and not only by the passions which in its turn the Revolution had roused, but also by numerous minor phenomena, which had escaped the attention of the investigator, and which were not even a part of social phenomena, properly so called. He wrote:

While these passions [roused by social phenomena] were operating, the physical and physiological forces of nature were not inactive: stones continued to obey the

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17. Incidentally, others say that Broglie was to blame for not waiting for his comrade, as he did not want to share the laurels of victory with him. This makes no difference to us, as it does not alter the case in the least.

law of gravity; the blood did not cease to circulate in the veins. Would not the course of events have changed had Mirabeau, say, not died of fever, had Robespierre been killed by the accidental fall of a brick or by a stroke of apoplexy, or if Bonaparte had been struck down by a bullet? And will you dare to assert that the outcome would have been the same? Given a sufficient number of accidents, similar to those I have asumed, the outcome might have been the very opposite of what, in your opinion, was inevitable. I have a right to assume the possibility of such accidents because they are precluded neither by the general causes of the Revolution nor by the passions roused by these general causes.

Then he goes on to quote the well-known observation that history would have taken an entirely different course had Cleopatra's nose been somewhat shorter; and, in conclusion, admitting that very much more could be said in defense of Mignet's view, he again shows where this author goes wrong. Mignet ascribes solely to the action of general causes those results which many other, minor, dark and elusive causes had helped to bring about; his stern logic, as it were, refuses to recognize the existence of anything that seems to him to be lacking in order and law.

## VI

Are Sainte-Beuve's objections sound? I think they contain a certain amount of truth. But what amount? To determine this we will first examine the idea that a man can "by the sudden decision of his will" introduce a new force into the course of events which is capable of changing their course considerably. We have quoted a number of examples, which, we think, very well explain this. Let us ponder over these examples.

Everybody knows that, during the reign of Louis XV, military affairs went steadily from bad to worse in France. As Henri Martin has observed, during the Seven Years' War, the French army, which always had numerous prostitutes, tradesmen and servants in its train, and which had three times as many pack horses as saddle horses, had more resemblance to the hordes of Darius and Xerxes than to the armies of Turenne and Gustavus-Adolphus.<sup>18</sup> Archenholtz says in his history of this war that the French officers, when appointed for guard duty, often deserted their posts to go dancing somewhere in the vicinity, and obeyed the orders of their superiors only when they thought fit. This deplorable state of military affairs was due to the deterioration of the aristocracy, which nevertheless, continued to occupy all the high posts in the army, and to the general dislocation of the "old order," which was rapidly drifting to its doom. These *general* causes alone would have been quite sufficient to make the outcome of the Seven Years' War unfavorable to France. But undoubtedly the incompetence of generals like Soubise greatly increased the chances of failure

18. *Histoire de France*, 4th edition, Vol. XV, pp. 520-21.

for the French army which these general causes already provided. Soubise retained his post, thanks to Madame Pompadour; and so we must count the proud Marquise as one of the "factors" significantly reinforcing the unfavorable influence of these general causes on the position of French affairs.

The Marquise de Pompadour was strong not by her own strength, but by the power of the king who was subject to her will. Can we say that the character of Louis XV was exactly what it was inevitably bound to be, in view of the general course of development of social relations in France? No, given the same course of development a king might have appeared in his place with a different attitude towards women. Sainte-Beuve would say that the action of obscure and intangible physiological causes was sufficient to account for this. And he would be right. But, if that is so, the conclusion emerges, that these obscure physiological causes, by affecting the progress and results of the Seven Years' War, also in consequence affected the subsequent development of France, which would have proceeded differently if the Seven Years' War had not deprived her of a great part of her colonies. Does not this conclusion, we then ask, contradict the conception of a social development conforming to laws?

No, not in the least. The effect of personal peculiarities in the instances we have discussed is undeniable; but no less undeniable is the fact that it could occur only in the given social conditions. After the battle of Rosbach, the French became fiercely indignant with Soubise's protectress. Every day she received numbers of anonymous letters, full of threats and abuse. This very seriously disturbed Madame Pompadour; she began to suffer from insomnia.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, she continued to protect Soubise. In 1762, she remarked in one of her letters to him that he was not justifying the hopes that had been placed in him, but she added: "Have no fear, however, I will take care of your interests and try to reconcile you with the king."<sup>20</sup> As you see, she did not yield to public opinion. Why did she not yield? Probably because French society of that day had no means of compelling her to do so. But why was French society of that day unable to do so? It was prevented from doing so by its form of organization, which in turn, was determined by the relation of social forces in France at that time. Hence, it is the relation of social forces which, in the last analysis, explains the fact that Louis XV's character, and the caprices of his favorite, could have such a deplorable influence on the fate of France. Had it not been the king who had a weakness for the fair sex, but the king's cook or groom, it would not have had any historical significance. Clearly, it is not the weakness that is important here, but the social position of the person afflicted with it. The reader will understand that these arguments can be applied to all the above-quoted examples. In these arguments it is necessary to change only what needs changing, for example, to put Russia in the place of France, Buturlin in place of Soubise, etc. That is why we will not repeat them.

It follows, then, that by virtue of particular traits of their character,

19. Cf. *Mémoires de madame du Halifet*, Paris, 1824, p. 181.

20. Cf. *Lettres de la marquise de Pompadour*, London, 1772, Vol. I.

individuals can influence the fate of society. Sometimes this influence is very considerable; but the possibility of exercising this influence, and its extent, are determined by the form of organization of society, by the relation of forces within it. The character of an individual is a "factor" in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such.

We may be told that the extent of personal influence may also be determined by the talents of the individual. We agree. But the individual can display his talents only when he occupies the position in society necessary for this. Why was the fate of France in the hands of a man who totally lacked the ability and desire to serve society? Because such was the form of organization of that society. It is the form of organization that in any given period determines the role and, consequently, the social significance that may fall to the lot of talented or incompetent individuals.

But if the role of individuals is determined by the form of organization of society, how can their social influence, which is determined by the role they play, contradict the conception of social development as a process expressing laws? It does not contradict it; on the contrary, it serves as one of its most vivid illustrations.

But here we must observe the following. The possibility—determined by the form of organization of society—that individuals may exercise social influence opens the door to the influence of so-called *accident* upon the historical destiny of nations. Louis XV's lasciviousness was an inevitable consequence of the state of his physical constitution, but in relation to the general course of France's development the state of his constitution was *accidental*. Nevertheless, as we have said, it did influence the fate of France and served as one of the causes which determined this fate. The death of Mirabeau, of course, was due to pathological processes which obeyed definite laws. The inevitability of these processes, however, did not arise out of the general course of France's development, but out of certain particular features of the celebrated orator's constitution, and out of the physical conditions under which he had contracted his disease. In relation to the general course of France's development these features and conditions were *accidental*. And yet, Mirabeau's death influenced the further course of the Revolution and served as one of the causes which determined it.

Still more astonishing was the effect of accidental causes in the above-mentioned example of Frederick II, who succeeded in extricating himself from an extremely difficult situation only because of Buturlin's irresolution. Even in relation to the general course of Russia's development Buturlin's appointment may have been accidental, in the sense that we have defined that term, and, of course, it had no relation whatever to the general course of Prussia's development. Yet it is not improbable that Buturlin's irresolution saved Frederick from a desperate situation. Had Suvorov been in Buturlin's place, the history of Prussia might have taken a different course. It follows, then, that sometimes the fate of nations depends on accidents,

which may be called *accidents of the second degree*. "*In allem Endlichen ist ein Element des Zufälligen*," said Hegel. (In everything finite there are accidental elements.) In science we deal only with the "finite"; hence we can say that all the processes studied by science contain some accidental elements. Does not this preclude the scientific cognition of phenomena? No. *Accident is something relative*. It appears only at the point of intersection of inevitable processes. For the inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, the appearance of Europeans in America was *accidental* in the sense that it did not follow from the social development of these countries. But the passion for navigation which possessed West Europeans at the end of the Middle Ages was not accidental; nor was the fact that the European forces easily overcame the resistance of the natives. The consequences of the conquest of Mexico and Peru by Europeans were also not accidental, in the last analysis, these consequences were determined by the resultant of two forces: the economic position of the conquered countries on the one hand, and the economic position of the conquerors on the other. And these forces, like their resultant, can fully serve as objects of scientific investigation.

The accidents of the Seven Years' War exercised considerable influence upon the subsequent history of Prussia. But their influence would have been entirely different at a different stage of Prussia's development. Here, too, the accidental consequences were determined by the resultant of two forces: the social-political conditions of Prussia on the one hand, and the social-political condition of the European countries that influenced her, on the other. Hence, here, too, accidents do not in the least hinder the scientific investigation of phenomena.

We know now that individuals often exercise considerable influence upon the fate of society, but this influence is determined by the internal structure of that society and by its relation to other societies. But this is not all that has to be said about the role of the individual in history. We must approach this question from still another side.

Sainte-Beuve thought that had there been a sufficient number of petty and dark causes of the kind that he had mentioned, the outcome of the French Revolution would have been the *opposite* of what we know it to have been. This is a great mistake. No matter how intricately the petty, psychological and physiological causes may have been interwoven, they would not under any circumstances have eliminated the great social needs that gave rise to the French Revolution; and as long as these needs remained unsatisfied the revolutionary movement in France would have continued. To make the outcome of this movement the opposite of what it was, the needs that gave rise to it would have had to be the opposite of what they were; and this, of course, no combination of petty causes would ever be able to bring about.

The causes of the French Revolution lay in the character of *social relations*; and the petty causes assumed by Sainte-Beuve could lie only in the *personal qualities of individuals*. The final cause of social relationships lies in the state of the productive forces. This depends on the qualities of

individuals only in the sense, perhaps, that these individuals possess more or less talent for making technical improvements, discoveries and inventions. Sainte-Beuve did not have these qualities in mind. No other qualities, however, enable individuals directly to influence the state of productive forces, and, hence, the social relations which they determine, i.e., *economic relations*. No matter what the qualities of the given individual may be, they cannot eliminate the given economic relations if the latter conform to the given state of productive forces. But the personal qualities of individuals make them more or less fit to satisfy those social needs which arise out of the given economic relations, or to counteract such satisfaction. The urgent social need of France at the end of the eighteenth century was the substitution for the obsolete political institutions of new institutions that would conform more to her economic system. The most prominent and useful public men of that time were those who were more capable than others of helping to satisfy this most urgent need. We will assume that Mirabeau, Robespierre and Napoleon were men of that type. What would have happened had premature death not removed Mirabeau from the political stage? The constitutional monarchist party would have retained its considerable power for a longer period; its resistance to the republicans would, therefore, have been more energetic. But that is all. No Mirabeau could, at that time, have averted the triumph of the republicans. Mirabeau's power rested entirely on the sympathy and confidence of the people; but the people wanted a republic, as the Court irritated them by its obstinate defense of the old order. As soon as the people had become convinced that Mirabeau did not sympathize with their republican strivings they would have ceased to sympathize with him; and then the great orator would have lost nearly all influence, and in all probability would have fallen a victim to the very movement that he would vainly have tried to check. Approximately the same thing may be said about Robespierre. Let us assume that he was an absolutely indispensable force in his party; but even so, he was not the only force. If the accidental fall of a brick had killed him, say, in January, 1793, his place would, of course, have been taken by somebody else, and although this person might have been inferior to him in every respect, nevertheless, events would have taken *the same course* as they did when Robespierre was alive. For example, even under these circumstances the Gironde would probably not have escaped defeat; but it is possible that Robespierre's party would have lost power somewhat earlier and we would now be speaking, not of the Thermidor reaction, but of the Floreal, Prairial or Messidor reaction. Perhaps some will say that with his inexorable Terror, Robespierre did not delay but hastened the downfall of his party. We will not stop to examine this supposition here; we will accept it as if it were quite sound. In that case we must assume that Robespierre's party would have fallen not in Thermidor, but in Fructidor, Vendémiaire or Brumaire. In short, it may have fallen sooner or perhaps later, but it certainly would have fallen, because the section of the people which supported Robespierre's party was totally unprepared to hold power for a prolonged

period. At all events, results "opposite" to those which arose from Robespierre's energetic action are out of the question.

Nor could they have arisen even if Bonaparte had been struck down by a bullet, let us say, at the Battle of Arcol. What he did in the Italian and other campaigns other generals would have done. Probably they would not have displayed the same talent as he did, and would not have achieved such brilliant victories; nevertheless the French Republic would have emerged victorious from the wars it waged at that time, because its soldiers were incomparably the best in Europe. As for the 18th of Brumaire and its influence on the internal life of France, here, too, *in essence*, the general course and outcome of events would probably have been the same as they were under Napoleon. The Republic, mortally wounded by the events of the 9th of Thermidor, was slowly dying. The Directoire was unable to restore order which the bourgeoisie, having rid itself of the rule of the aristocracy, now desired most of all. To restore order a "good sword," as Siéyès expressed it, was needed. At first it was thought that General Jourdan would serve in this virtuous role, but when he was killed at Novi, the names of Moreau, MacDonald and Bernadotte were mentioned.<sup>21</sup> Bonaparte was only mentioned later: and had he been killed, like Jourdan, he would not have been mentioned at all, and some other "sword" would have been put forward. It goes without saying that the man whom events had elevated to the position of dictator must have been tirelessly aspiring to power himself, energetically pushing aside and ruthlessly crushing all who stood in his way. Bonaparte was a man of iron energy and was remorseless in the pursuit of his goal. But there were not a few energetic, talented and ambitious egoists in those days besides him. The place Bonaparte succeeded in occupying would, probably, not have remained vacant. Let us assume that the other general who had secured this place would have been more peaceful than Napoleon, that he would not have roused the whole of Europe against himself, and therefore, would have died in the Tuileries and not on the island of St. Helena. In that case, the Bourbons would not have returned to France at all; for them, such a result would certainly have been the "opposite" of what it was. In its relation to the internal life of France as a whole, however, this result would have differed little from the actual result. After the "good sword" had restored order and had consolidated the power of the bourgeoisie, the latter would have soon tired of its barrack-room habits and despotism. A liberal movement would have arisen, similar to the one that arose after the Restoration; the fight would have gradually flared up, and as "good swords" are not distinguished for their yielding nature, the virtuous Louise-Philippe would, perhaps, have ascended the throne of his dearly beloved kinsmen, not in 1830, but in 1820, or in 1825. All such changes in the course of events might to some extent, have influenced the subsequent political, and through it, the economic life of Europe. Nevertheless, under no circumstances would the final outcome of the revolutionary movement have been the "opposite" of what it was. Owing to

21. *La vie en France sous le premier Empire*, de Broc, Paris, 1895, pp. 35-36.



the specific qualities of their minds and characters, influential individuals can change the *individual features of events and some of their particular consequences*, but they cannot change their *general trend*, which is determined by other forces.

## VII

Furthermore, we must also note the following. In discussing the role great men play in history, we nearly always fall victims to a sort of optical illusion, to which it will be useful to draw the reader's attention.

In coming out in the role of the "good sword" to save public order, Napoleon prevented all the other generals from playing this role, and some of them might have performed it in the same ways or almost the same way, as he did. Once the public need for an energetic military ruler was satisfied, the social organization barred the road to the position of military ruler for all other talented soldiers. Its power became a power that was unfavorable to the appearance of other talents of a similar kind. This is the cause of the optical illusion, which we have mentioned. Napoleon's personal power presents itself to us in an extremely magnified form, for we place to his account the social power which had brought him to the front and supported him. Napoleon's power appears to us to be something quite exceptional because the other powers similar to it did not pass from the potential to the real. And when we are asked, "What would have happened if there had been no Napoleon?" our *imagination* becomes confused and it seems to us that without him the social movement upon which his power and influence were based could not have taken place.

In the history of the development of human intellect, the success of some individual hinders the success of another individual much more rarely. But even here we are not free from the above-mentioned optical illusion. When a given state of society sets certain problems before its intellectual representatives, the attention of prominent minds is concentrated upon them until these problems are solved. As soon as they have succeeded in solving them, their attention is transferred to another object. By solving a problem a given talent A diverts the attention of talent B from the problem already solved to another problem. And when we are asked: What would have happened if A had died before he had solved problem X?—we imagine that the thread of development of the human intellect would have been broken. We forget that had A died B, or C, or D might have tackled the problem, and the thread of intellectual development would have remained intact in spite of A's premature demise.

In order that a man who possesses a particular kind of talent may, by means of it, greatly influence the course of events, two conditions are needed: First, this talent must make him more conformable to the social needs of the given epoch than anyone else. If Napoleon had possessed the musical gifts of Beethoven instead of his own military genius he would not, of course, have become an emperor. Second, the existing social order must not bar the road to the person possessing the talent which is needed and

useful precisely at the given time. This very *Napoleon* would have died as the barely known General, or Colonel, *Bonaparte* had the older order in France existed another seventy-five years.<sup>22</sup> In 1789, Davout, Désaix, Marmont and MacDonald were subalterns; Bernadotte was a *sergeant-major*; Hoche, Marceau, Lefebvre, Pichegru, Ney, Masséna, Murat and Soult were *non-commissioned officers*; Augereau was a *fencing master*; Lannes was a *dyer*; Gouvion Saint-Cyr was an *actor*; Jourdan was a *peddler*; Bessières was a *barber*; Brune was a *compositor*; Joubert and Junot were *law students*; Kléber was an *architect*; Martier did not see any military service until the Revolution.<sup>23</sup>

Had the old order continued to exist up to our days it would never have occurred to any of us that in France, at the end of the last century, certain actors, composers, barbers, dyers, lawyers, peddlers and fencing masters had been potential military geniuses.<sup>24</sup>

Stendhal observed that a man who was born at the same time as Titian, in 1477, could have lived forty years with Raphael, who died in 1520, and with Leonardo da Vinci, who died in 1519; that he could have spent many years with Corregio, who died in 1534, and with Michelangelo, who lived until 1563; that he would have been no more than thirty-four years of age when Giorgione died; that he could have been acquainted with Tintoretto, Bassano, Veronese, Julian Romano and Andrea del Sarto; that, in short, he would have been the contemporary of all the great painters, with the exception of those who belonged to the Bologna School, which arose a full century later.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, it may be said that a man who was born in the same year as Wouwermann could have been personally acquainted with nearly all the great Dutch painters!<sup>26</sup> and a man of the same age as Shakespeare would have been the contemporary of a number of remarkable playwrights.<sup>27</sup>

22. Probably Napoleon would have gone to Russia, *where he had intended to go just a few years before the Revolution*. Here, no doubt, he would have distinguished himself in action against the Turks or the Caucasian highlanders, but nobody here would have thought that this poor, but capable, officer could, under favorable circumstances, have become the ruler of the world.

23. Cf. *Histoire de France*, V. Duruy, Paris, 1893, Vol. II, pp. 524-25.

24. In the reign of Louis XV, only one representative of the third estate, Chevert, could rise to the rank of lieutenant-general. In the reign of Louis XVI it was even more difficult for members of this estate to make a military career. Cf. Rambeau, *Histoire de la civilisation française*, 6th edition, Vol. II, p. 226.

25. *Historie de la Peinture en Italie*, Paris, 1889, pp. 23-25.

26. Terburg, Brower and Rembrandt were born in 1608; Adrian Van-Ostade and Ferdinand Bol were born in 1610; Van der Holst and Gerard Dow were born in 1615; Wouwermann was born in 1620; Werniks, Everdingen and Painaker were born in 1621; Bergham was born in 1624 and Paul Potter in 1629; Jan Steen was born in 1626; Ruysdal and Metsu were born in 1630; Van der Haiden was born in 1637; Hobbema was born in 1638 and Adrian Van der Velde was born in 1639.

27. "Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson, Webster, Massinger, Ford, Middleton and Heywood, who appeared at the same time, or following each other, represented the new generation which, owing to its favorable position, flourished on the soil which had been prepared by the efforts of the preceding generation." Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Paris, 1863, Vol. I, p. 468.

It has long been observed that great talents appear everywhere, whenever the social conditions favorable to their development exist. This means that every man of talent who *actually appears*, every man of talent who becomes a *social force*, is the product of *social relations*. Since this is the case, it is clear why talented people can, as we have said, change only individual features of events, but not their general trend; *they are themselves the product of this trend; were it not for that trend they would never have crossed the threshold that divides the potential from the real.*

It goes without saying that there is talent and talent. "When a fresh step in the development of civilization calls into being a new form of art," rightly says Taine, "scores of talents which only half express social thought appear around one or two geniuses who express it perfectly."<sup>28</sup> If, owing to certain mechanical or physiological causes unconnected with the general course of the social-political and intellectual development of Italy, Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci had died in their infancy, Italian art would have been less perfect, but the general trend of its development in the period of the Renaissance would have remained the same. Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo did not create this trend; they were merely its best representatives. True, usually a whole school springs up around a man of genius, and his pupils try to copy his methods to the minutest details; that is why the gap that would have been left in Italian art in the period of the Renaissance by the early death of Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci would have strongly influenced many of the secondary features of its subsequent history. But in essence, there would have been no change in this history, provided there were no important change in the general course of the intellectual development of Italy due to general causes.

It is well known, however, that quantitative differences ultimately pass into qualitative differences. This is true everywhere, and is therefore true in history. A given trend in art may remain without any remarkable expression if an unfavorable combination of circumstances carries away, one after the other, several talented people who might have given it expression. But the premature death of such talented people can prevent the artistic expression of this trend only if it is too shallow to produce new talent. As, however, the depth of any given trend in literature and art is determined by its importance for the class, or stratum, whose tastes it expresses, and by the social role played by that class or stratum, here, too, in the last analysis, everything depends upon the course of social development and on the relation of social forces.

## VIII

Thus, the personal qualities of leading people determine the individual features of historical events; and the accidental element, in the sense that we have indicated, always plays some role in the course of these events,

28. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature, anglaise*, Paris, 1883, Vol. I, p. 5.

the trend of which is determined, in the last analysis, by so-called general causes, i.e., actually by the development of productive forces and the mutual relations between men in the social-economic process of production. Casual phenomena and the personal qualities of celebrated people are ever so much more noticeable than deep-lying general causes. The eighteenth century pondered but little over these general causes, and claimed that history was explained by the conscious actions and "passions" of historical personages. The philosophers of that century asserted that history might have taken an entirely different course as a result of the most insignificant causes; for example, if some "atom" had started playing pranks in some ruler's head (an idea expressed more than once in *Système de la Nature*).

The adherents of the new trend in the science of history began to argue that history could not have taken any other course than the one it has taken, notwithstanding all "atoms." Striving to emphasize the effect of general causes as much as possible, they ignored the personal qualities of historical personages. According to their argument, historical events would not have been affected in the least by the substitution of some persons for others, more or less capable.<sup>29</sup> But if we make such an assumption then we must admit that the *personal element is of no significance whatever in history*, and that everything can be reduced to the operation of general causes, to the general laws of historical progress. This would be going to an extreme which leaves no room for the particle of truth contained in the opposite opinion. It is precisely for this reason that the opposite opinion retained some right to existence. The collision between these two opinions assumed the form of an antinomy, the first part of which was general laws, and the second part was the activities of individuals. From the point of view of the second part of the antinomy, history was simply a chain of accidents; from the point of view of the first part it seemed that even the individual features of historical events were determined by the operation of general causes. But if the individual features of events are determined by the influence of general causes and do not depend upon the personal qualities of historical personages, it follows that these features are *determined by general causes* and cannot be changed, no matter how much these personages may change. Thus, the theory assumes a *fatalistic character*.

This did not escape the attention of its opponents. Sainte-Beuve compared Mignet's conception of history with that of Bossuet. Bossuet thought that the force which causes historical events to take place comes from above, that events serve to express the divine will. Mignet sought for this force in the human passions, which are displayed in historical events as inexorably and immutably as the forces of nature. But both regarded history as a chain of phenomena which could not have been different, no matter under what circumstances; both were fatalists; in this respect, the

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29. According to their argument, i.e., when they began to discuss the tendency of historical events to conform to laws. When, however, some of them simply described these phenomena, they sometimes ascribed even exaggerated significance to the personal element. What interests us now, however, are not their descriptions, but their arguments.

philosopher was not far removed from the priest (*le philosophe se rapproche du prêtre*).

This reproach was justified as long as the doctrine that social phenomena conformed to certain laws reduced the influence of the personal qualities of prominent historical individuals to a cipher. And the impression made by this reproach was all the more strong for the reason that the historians of the new school, like the historians and philosophers of the eighteenth century, regarded *human nature* as a higher instance, from which all the *general causes* of historical movement sprang, and to which they were subordinated. As the French Revolution had shown that historical events are not determined by the *conscious* actions of men alone, Mignet and Guizot, and the other historians of the same trend, put in the forefront the effect of *passions*, which often rebelled against all control of the mind. But if passions are the final and most general cause of historical events, then why is Sainte-Beuve wrong in asserting that the outcome of the French Revolution might have been the opposite of what we know it was if there had been individuals capable of imbuing the French people with passions opposite to those which had excited them? Mignet would have said: Because other passions could not have excited the French people at that time owing to the very qualities of human nature. In a certain sense this would have been true. But this truth would have had a strongly fatalistic tinge, for it would have been on a par with the thesis that the history of mankind, in all its details, is predetermined by the *general* qualities of human nature. Fatalism would have appeared here as the result of the disappearance of the *individual* in the *general*. Incidentally, it is always the result of such a disappearance. It is said: "If all social phenomena are inevitable, then our activities cannot have any significance." This is a correct idea wrongly formulated. We ought to say: if everything occurs as a result of the *general*, then the *individual*, including my efforts, is of no significance. *This* deduction is correct; but it is incorrectly employed. It is meaningless when applied to the modern materialist conception of history, in which there is room also for the *individual*. But it was justified when applied to the views of the French historians in the period of the Restoration.

At the present time, human nature can no longer be regarded as the final and most general cause of historical progress: if it is constant, then it cannot explain the extremely changeable course of history; if it is changeable, then obviously its changes are themselves determined by historical progress. At the present time we must regard the development of productive forces as the final and most general cause of the historical progress of mankind, and it is these productive forces that determine the consecutive changes in the social relations of men. Parallel with this *general* cause there are *particular* causes, i.e., the *historical situation* in which the development of the productive forces of a given nation proceeds and which, in the last analysis, is itself created by the development of these forces among other nations, i.e., the same general cause.

Finally, the influence of the *particular* causes is supplemented by the operation of *individual* causes, i.e., the personal qualities of public men and

other "accidents," thanks to which events finally assume their *individual features*. Individual causes cannot bring about fundamental changes in the operation of *general and particular* causes which, moreover, determine the trend and limits of the influence of individual causes. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that history would have had different features had the individual causes which had influenced it been replaced by other causes of the same order.

Monod and Lamprecht still adhere to the human nature point of view. Lamprecht has categorically, and more than once, declared that in his opinion social mentality is the fundamental cause of historical phenomena. This is a great mistake, and as a result of this mistake the desire, very laudable in itself, to take into account the sum total of social life may lead only to vapid eclecticism or, among the most consistent, to Kahlitz's arguments concerning the relative significance of the mind and the senses.

But let us return to our subject. A great man is great not because his personal qualities give individual features to great historical events, but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great social needs of his time, needs which arose as a result of general and particular causes. Carlyle, in his well-known book on heroes and hero-worship, calls great men *beginners*. This is a very apt description. A great man is precisely a beginner because he sees *further* than others, and desires things *more strongly* than others. He solves the scientific problems brought up by the preceding process of intellectual development of society; he points to the new social needs created by the preceding development of social relationships; he takes the initiative in satisfying these needs. He is a hero. But he is not a hero in the sense that he can stop, or change, the natural course of things, but in the sense of this inevitable and unconscious course. Herein lies all his significance; herein lies his whole power. But this significance is colossal, and the power is terrible.

Bismarck said that we cannot make history and must wait while it is being made. But who makes history? It is made by the *social man*, who is its sole "*factor*." The social man creates his own, social, relationships. But if in a given period he creates given relationships and not others, there must be some cause for it, of course; it is determined by the state of his productive forces. No great man can foist on society relations which *no longer* conform to the state of these forces, or which *do not yet* conform to them. In this sense, indeed, he cannot make history, and in this sense he would advance the hands of his clock in vain; he would not hasten the passage of time, nor turn it back. Here Lamprecht is quite right: even at the height of his power Bismarck could not cause Germany to revert to natural economy.

Social relationships have their inherent logic: as long as people live in given mutual relationships they will feel, think and act in a given way, and no other. Attempts on the part of public men to combat this logic would also be fruitless; the natural course of things (this logic of social relationships) would reduce all his effort to nought. But if I know in what direction social relations are changing owing to given changes in the social-economic

process of production, I also know in what direction social mentality is changing; consequently, I am able to influence it. Influencing social mentality means influencing historical events. Hence, in a certain sense, I *can make history*, and there is no need for me to wait while "it is being made."

Monod believes that really important events and individuals in history are important only as signs and symbols of the development of institutions and economic conditions. This is a correct although very inexactlly expressed idea; but precisely because this idea is correct it is wrong to oppose the activities of great men to "the *slow progress*" of the conditions and institutions mentioned. The more or less slow changes in "economic conditions" periodically confront society with the necessity of more or less rapidly changing its institutions. This change never takes place "by itself"; it always needs the intervention of *men*, who are thus confronted with great social problems. And it is those men who do more than others to facilitate the solution of these problems who are called great men. But *solving a problem* does not mean being only a "symbol" and a "sign" of the fact that it has been solved.

We think that Monod opposed the one to the other mainly because he was carried away by the pleasant catch-word, "*slow*." Many modern evolutionists are very fond of this catchword. *Psychologically*, this passion is comprehensible: it *inevitably* arises in the respectable milieu of moderation and punctiliousness. . . . But *logically* it does not bear examination, as Hegel proved.

And it is not only for "beginners," not only for "great" men that a broad field of activity is open. It is open for all those who have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to love their neighbors. The concept *great* is a relative concept. In the ethical sense every man is great who, to use the Biblical phrase, "lays down his life for his friend."

## TOLSTOY (1828-1910)

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ALTHOUGH LEO TOLSTOY was neither a philosopher nor a historian by profession, the narrative of his novel *War and Peace* (1869) is interspersed by a number of passages concerning history, and in the "Second Epilogue," with which the book concludes, he presents his views on the subject at length and in detail. Since Tolstoy shows an acute awareness of

the type of theoretical problem that is apt to come to the surface as a result of reflection on the nature of historical inquiry, together with a formidable critical insight into questions of historical procedure and terminology, it has seemed justifiable to include some extracts from his discussion.\*

Tolstoy rejected both the conventional type of history of his day which sought to exhibit historical events as the effects of the activities of great or powerful individuals and, also, what he termed "universal histories" and "histories of culture." The latter, recognizing the weaknesses inherent in "great man" historiography, attempted to account for historical developments in some other way; by, for example, appealing to the influence of "ideas" or intellectual movements, or by assuming the operation of underlying "forces" which in some way produce the events of history or cause historical agents to do what they do. The root objection both to interpretations of this kind and to interpretations giving priority of place to the "free" choices and decisions of outstanding individuals was, Tolstoy thought, that they all in the end fell back upon the unanalyzed concept of *power*—a concept which, as customarily used, was sufficiently vague and ill-defined to disguise a fundamental ignorance of the real causes of historical change. Thus Tolstoy was led to sweep aside the host of different theories in which the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries abounded: heroic, ideological, and so-called "scientific" interpretations all seemed to him to be equally unacceptable.

Tolstoy cannot be said to have given the practicing historian much in the way of either solace or guidance. Although many of his criticisms of the fashion in which historians of his time were prone to discuss and interpret historical occurrences were no doubt justified, it is difficult not to feel that their edge was considerably blunted by the fact that he was judging history according to a peculiar standard of his own. He was not prepared to recognize the validity of accepted canons of historical procedure, but in setting out his own views he was too deeply influenced by the belief that historical inquiry can only merit respect if it is capable of producing results comparable with those achieved in mathematics and in the physical sciences. Yet however unsatisfactory and even metaphysical his positive doctrine of "the integration of infinitesimals" may be judged to have been, Tolstoy's observations at least have the advantage of throwing into relief some of the difficulties confronting students of human affairs, difficulties which—as he all too clearly saw—were merely obscured by bland generalities and crude conceptual tools employed by many historians and social theorists of his age. And, quite apart from considerations of historical methodology, his reflections on the problem of the compatibility of human freedom with determinism have a considerable interest in their own right: certainly his approach to this question is very different from that of philosophers who (both in his time and in ours) have claimed that it represents an unreal dilemma and who have argued that the concept of freedom is prop-

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\*For a penetrating discussion of Tolstoy's view of history, see I. Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (London, 1953).



erly opposed, not to that of causal determination, but to notions like constraint. It is unlikely that Tolstoy would have been impressed by such suggestions.

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## 1. The Difficulty of Defining the Forces That Move Nations\*

Modern history has rejected the beliefs of the ancients without replacing them by a new conception, and the logic of the situation has obliged the historians, after they had apparently rejected the divine authority of the kings and the "fate" of the ancients, to reach the same conclusion by another road, that is, to recognize (1) nations guided by individual men, and (2) the existence of a known aim to which these nations and humanity at large are tending.

At the basis of the works of all the modern historians from Gibbon to Buckle, despite their seeming disagreements and the apparent novelty of their outlooks, lie those two old, unavoidable assumptions.

In the first place the historian describes the activity of individuals who in his opinion have directed humanity (one historian considers only monarchs, generals, and ministers as being such men, while another includes also orators, learned men, reformers, philosophers, and poets). Secondly, it is assumed that the goal toward which humanity is being led is known to the historians: to one of them this goal is the greatness of the Roman, Spanish, or French realm; to another it is liberty, equality, and a certain kind of civilization of a small corner of the world called Europe.

In 1789 a ferment arises in Paris; it grows, spreads, and is expressed by a movement of peoples from west to east. Several times it moves eastward and collides with a countermovement from the east westward. In 1812 it reaches its extreme limit, Moscow, and then, with remarkable symmetry, a countermovement occurs from east to west, attracting to it, as the first movement had done, the nations of middle Europe. The countermovement reaches the starting point of the first movement in the west—Paris—and subsides.

During that twenty-year period an immense number of fields were left untilled, houses were burned, trade changed its direction, millions of men

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\*All selections in this chapter are from *War and Peace* in the authorized translation by Louise and Aylmer Maude, copyright by Oxford University Press, with whose kind permission they are reprinted.

migrated, were impoverished, or were enriched, and millions of Christian men professing the law of love of their fellows slew one another.

What does all this mean? Why did it happen? What made those people burn houses and slay their fellow men? What were the causes of these events? What force made men act so? These are the instinctive, plain, and most legitimate questions humanity asks itself when it encounters the monuments and tradition of that period.

For a reply to these questions the common sense of mankind turns to the science of history, whose aim is to enable nations and humanity to know themselves.

If history had retained the conception of the ancients it would have said that God, to reward or punish his people, gave Napoleon power and directed his will to the fulfillment of the divine ends, and that reply would have been clear and complete. One might believe or disbelieve in the divine significance of Napoleon, but for anyone believing in it there would have been nothing unintelligible in the history of that period, nor would there have been any contradictions.

But modern history cannot give that reply. Science does not admit the conception of the ancients as to the direct participation of the Deity in human affairs, and therefore history ought to give other answers.

Modern history replying to these questions says: you want to know what this movement means, what caused it, and what force produced these events? Then listen:

"Louis XIV was a very proud and self-confident man; he had such and such mistresses and such and such ministers and he ruled France badly. His descendants were weak men and they too ruled France badly. And they had such and such favorites and such and such mistresses. Moreover, certain men wrote some books at that time. At the end of the eighteenth century there were a couple of dozen men in Paris who began to talk about all men being free and equal. This caused people all over France to begin to slash at and drown one another. They killed the king and many other people. At that time there was in France a man of genius—Napoleon. He conquered everybody everywhere—that is, he killed many people because he was a great genius. And for some reason he went to kill Africans, and killed them so well and was so cunning and wise that when he returned to France he ordered everybody to obey him, and they all obeyed him. Having become an Emperor he again went out to kill people in Italy, Austria, and Prussia. And there too he killed a great many. In Russia there was an Emperor, Alexander, who decided to restore order in Europe and therefore fought against Napoleon. In 1807 he suddenly made friends with him, but in 1811 they again quarrelled and again began killing many people. Napoleon led six hundred thousand men into Russia and captured Moscow; then he suddenly ran away from Moscow, and the Emperor Alexander, helped by the advice of Stein and others, united Europe to arm against the disturber of its peace. All Napoleon's allies suddenly became his enemies and their forces advanced against the fresh forces he raised. The Allies defeated Napoleon, entered Paris, forced Napoleon to abdicate,

and sent him to the island of Elba, not depriving him of the title of Emperor and showing him every respect, though five years before and one year later they all regarded him as an outlaw and a brigand. Then Louis XVIII, who till then had been the laughing-stock both of the French and the Allies, began to reign. And Napoleon, shedding tears before his Old Guards, renounced the throne and went into exile. Then the skilful statesmen and diplomats (especially Talleyrand, who managed to sit down in a particular chair before anyone else and thereby extended the frontiers of France) talked in Vienna and by these conversations made the nations happy or unhappy. Suddenly the diplomatists and monarchs nearly quarrelled and were on the point of again ordering their armies to kill one another, but just then Napoleon arrived in France with a battalion, and the French, who had been hating him, immediately all submitted to him. But the Allied monarchs were angry at this and went to fight the French once more. And they defeated the genius Napoleon and, suddenly recognizing him as a brigand, sent him to the island of St. Helena. And the exile, separated from the beloved France so dear to his heart, died a lingering death on that rock and bequeathed his great deeds to posterity. But in Europe a reaction occurred and the sovereigns once again all began to oppress their subjects."

It would be a mistake to think that this is ironic—a caricature of the historical accounts. On the contrary it is a very mild expression of the contradictory replies, not meeting the questions, which *all* the historians give, from the compilers of memoirs and the histories of separate states to the writers of general histories and the new histories of the *culture* of that period.

The strangeness and absurdity of these replies arise from the fact that modern history, like a deaf man, answers questions no one has asked.

If the purpose of history be to give a description of the movement of humanity and of the peoples, the first question—in the absence of a reply to which all the rest will be incomprehensible—is: what is the power that moves peoples? To this, modern history laboriously replies either that Napoleon was a great genius, or that Louis XIV was very proud, or that certain writers wrote certain books.

All that may be so and mankind is ready to agree with it, but it is not what was asked. All *that* would be interesting if we recognized a divine power based on itself and always consistently directing its nations through Napoleons, Louis-es, and writers; but we do not acknowledge such a power, and therefore before speaking about Napoleons, Louis-es, and authors, we ought to be shown the connection existing between these men and the movement of the nations.

If instead of a divine power some other force has appeared, it should be explained in what this new force consists, for the whole interest of history lies precisely in that force.

History seems to assume that this force is self-evident and known to everyone. But in spite of every desire to regard it as known, anyone reading many historical works cannot help doubting whether this new force, so

variously understood by the historians themselves, is really quite well known to everybody.

What force moves the nations?

Biographical historians and historians of separate nations understand this force as a power inherent in heroes and rulers. In their narration events occur solely by the will of a Napoleon, an Alexander, or in general of the persons they describe. The answers given by this kind of historian to the question of what force causes events to happen are satisfactory only as long as there is but one historian to each event. As soon as historians of different nationalities and tendencies begin to describe the same event, the replies they give immediately lose all meaning, for this force is understood by them all not only differently but often in quite contradictory ways. One historian says that an event was produced by Napoleon's power, another that it was produced by Alexander's, a third that it was due to the power of some other person. Besides this, historians of that kind contradict each other even in their statement as to the force on which the authority of some particular person was based. Thiers, a Bonapartist, says that Napoleon's power was based on his virtue and genius. Lanfrey, a Republican,\* says it was based on his trickery and deception of the people. So the historians of this class, by mutually destroying one another's positions, destroy the understanding of the force which produces events, and furnish no reply to history's essential question.

Writers of universal history who deal with all the nations seem to recognize how erroneous is the specialist historians' view of the force which produces events. They do not recognize it as a power inherent in heroes and rulers, but as the resultant of a multiplicity of variously directed forces. In describing a war or the subjugation of a people, a general historian looks for the cause of the event not in the power of one man, but in the interaction of many persons connected with the event.

According to this view the power of historical personages, represented as the product of many forces, can no longer, it would seem, be regarded as a force that itself produces events. Yet in most cases universal historians still employ the conception of power as a force that itself produces events, and treat it as their cause. In their exposition, an historic character is first the product of his time, and his power only the resultant of various forces, and then his power is itself a force producing events. Gervinus,\*\* Schlosser,† and others, for instance, at one time prove Napoleon to be a product of the Revolution, of the ideas of 1789 and so forth, and at another plainly say that the campaign of 1812 and other things they do not like were simply the product of Napoleon's misdirected will, and that the very ideas of 1789 were arrested in their development by Napoleon's

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\*Pierre Lanfrey (1828-77). *His Histoire de Napoléon Ier* began to appear when Tolstoy was finishing *War and Peace*. (Translator's Note)

\*\*Dr. C. G. Gervinus (1805-71) was a German historian and Shakespearean commentator with whom Tolstoy disagreed on both counts. (Translator's Note)

†F. G. Schlosser (1776-1861). *Professor of history at Heidelberg*. Author of a 19-volume work, *Weltgeschichte*. (Translator's Note)

caprice. The ideas of the Revolution and the general temper of the age produced Napoleon's power. But Napoleon's power suppressed the ideas of the Revolution and the general temper of the age.

This curious contradiction is not accidental. Not only does it occur at every step, but the universal historians' accounts are all made up of a chain of such contradictions. This contradiction occurs because after entering the field of analysis the universal historians stop halfway.

To find component forces equal to the composite or resultant force, the sum of the components must equal the resultant. This condition is never observed by the universal historians, and so to explain the resultant forces they are obliged to admit, in addition to the insufficient components, another unexplained force affecting the resultant action . . .

A third class of historians—the so-called historians of culture—following the path laid down by the universal historians who sometimes accept writers and ladies as forces producing events—again take that force to be something quite different. They see it in what is called culture—in mental activity.

The historians of culture are quite consistent in regard to their progenitors, the writers of universal histories, for if historical events may be explained by the fact that certain persons treated one another in such and such ways, why not explain them by the fact that such and such people wrote such and such books? Of the immense number of indications accompanying every vital phenomenon, these historians select the indication of intellectual activity and say that this indication is the cause. But despite their endeavors to prove that the cause of events lies in intellectual activity, only by a great stretch can one admit that there is any connection between intellectual activity and the movement of peoples, and in no case can one admit that intellectual activity controls people's actions, for that view is not confirmed by such facts as the very cruel murders of the French Revolution resulting from the doctrine of the equality of man, or the very cruel wars and executions resulting from the preaching of love.

But even admitting as correct all the cunningly devised arguments with which these histories are filled—admitting that nations are governed by some undefined force called an *idea*—history's essential question still remains unanswered, and to the former power of monarchs and to the influence of advisers and other people introduced by the universal historians, another, newer force—the *idea*—is added, the connection of which with the masses needs explanation. It is possible to understand that Napoleon had power and so events occurred; with some effort one may even conceive that Napoleon together with other influences was the cause of an event; but how a book, *Le Contrat Social*, had the effect of making Frenchmen begin to drown one another cannot be understood without an explanation of the causal nexus of this new force with the event.

Undoubtedly some relation exists between all who live contemporaneously, and so it is possible to find some connection between the intellectual activity of men and their historical movements, just as such a connection

may be found between the movements of humanity and commerce, handicraft, gardening, or anything else you please. But why intellectual activity is considered by the historians of culture to be the cause or expression of the whole historical movement is hard to understand. Only the following considerations can have led the historians to such a conclusion: (1) that history is written by learned men, and so it is natural and agreeable for them to think that the activity of their class supplies the basis of the movement of all humanity, just as a similar belief is natural and agreeable to traders, agriculturists, and soldiers (if they do not express it, that is merely because traders and soldiers do not write history), and (2) that spiritual activity, enlightenment, civilization, culture, ideas, are all indistinct, indefinite conceptions under whose banner it is very easy to use words having a still less definite meaning and which can therefore be readily introduced into any theory. . . .

The writers of universal histories and of the history of culture are like people who, recognizing the defects of paper money, decide to substitute for it money made of metal that has not the specific gravity of gold. It may indeed make jingling coin, but will do no more than that. Paper money may deceive the ignorant, but nobody is deceived by tokens of base metal that have no value but merely jingle. As gold is gold only if it is serviceable not merely for exchange but also for use, so universal historians will be valuable only when they can reply to history's essential question: what is power? The universal historians give contradictory replies to that question, while the historians of culture evade it and answer something quite different. And as counters of imitation gold can be used only among a group of people who agree to accept them as gold, or among those who do not know the nature of gold, so universal historians and historians of culture, not answering humanity's essential question, serve as currency for some purposes of their own, only in universities and among the mass of readers who have a taste for what they call "serious reading." . . .

[According to Tolstoy, the historical process is a continuum, made up of infinitely small actions and events; thus every attempt to break it up into arbitrary segments, to abstract, to generalize, to schematize, must (he thought) necessarily distort its true character. This is the fundamental source of all the difficulties which historians have encountered in their attempts to interpret the past. What about that "power" which historians and social theorists rely upon so much but understand so little? If we actually consider the relation of the commanders and leaders of history to those over whom they are glibly said to have "exercised" power we shall discover, Tolstoy suggests, that this relation is different from what it has commonly been supposed to have been.]

The movement of humanity, arising as it does from innumerable arbitrary human wills, is continuous.

To understand the laws of this continuous movement is the aim of history. But to arrive at these laws, resulting from the sum of all those human

wills, man's mind postulates arbitrary and disconnected units. The first method of history is to take an arbitrarily selected series of continuous events and examine it apart from others, though there is and can be no beginning to any event, for one event always flows uninterruptedly from another.

The second method is to consider the actions of some one man—a king or a commander—as equivalent to the sum of many individual wills; whereas the sum of individual wills is never expressed by the activity of a single historic personage.

Historical science in its endeavor to draw nearer to truth continually takes smaller and smaller units for examination. But however small the units it takes, we feel that to take any unit disconnected from others, or to assume a beginning of any phenomenon, or to say that the will of many men is expressed by the actions of any one historic personage, is in itself false.

It needs no critical exertion to reduce utterly to dust any deductions drawn from history. It is merely necessary to select some larger or smaller unit as the subject of observation—as criticism has every right to do, seeing that whatever unit history observes must always be arbitrarily selected.

Only by taking infinitesimally small units for observation (the differential of history, that is, the individual tendencies of men) and attaining to the art of integrating them (that is, finding the sum of these infinitesimals) can we hope to arrive at the laws of history.

The first fifteen years of the nineteenth century in Europe present an extraordinary movement of millions of people. Men leave their customary pursuits, hasten from one side of Europe to the other, plunder and slaughter one another, triumph and are plunged in despair, and for some years the whole course of life is altered and presents an intensive movement which first increases and then slackens. What was the cause of this movement, by what laws was it governed? asks the mind of man.

The historians, replying to this question, lay before us the sayings and doings of a few dozen men in a building in the city of Paris, calling these sayings and doings "the Revolution"; then they give a detailed biography of Napoleon and of certain people favorable or hostile to him; tell of the influence some of these people had on others, and say: that is why this movement took place and those are its laws.

But the mind of man not only refuses to believe this explanation, but plainly says that this method of explanation is fallacious, because in it a weaker phenomenon is taken as the cause of a stronger. The sum of human wills produced the Revolution and Napoleon, and only the sum of those wills first tolerated and then destroyed them.

"But every time there have been conquests there have been conquerors; every time there has been a revolution in any state there have been great men," says history. And, indeed, human reason replies: every time conquerors appear there have been wars, but this does not prove that the

conquerors caused the wars and that it is possible to find the laws of a war in the personal activity of a single man. Whenever I look at my watch and its hands point to ten, I hear the bells of the neighboring church; but because the bells begin to ring when the hands of the clock reach ten, I have no right to assume that the movement of the bells is caused by the position of the hands of the watch.

Whenever I see the movement of a locomotive I hear the whistle and see the valves opening and wheels turning; but I have no right to conclude that the whistling and the turning of wheels are the cause of the movement of the engine.

The peasants say that a cold wind blows in late in spring because the oaks are budding, and really every spring cold winds do blow when the oak is budding. But though I do not know what causes the cold winds to blow when the oak buds unfold, I cannot agree with the peasants that the unfolding of the oak buds is the cause of the cold wind, for the force of the wind is beyond the influence of the buds. I see only a coincidence of occurrences such as happens with all the phenomena of life, and I see that however much and however carefully I observe the hands of the watch, and the valves and wheels of the engine, and the oak, I shall not discover the cause of the bells ringing, the engine moving, or of the winds of spring. To do that I must entirely change my point of view and study the laws of the movement of steam, of the bells, and of the wind. History must do the same. And attempts in this direction have already been made.

To study the laws of history we must completely change the subject of our observation, must leave aside kings, ministers, and generals, and study the common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved. No one can say in how far it is possible for man to advance in this way toward an understanding of the laws of history; but it is evident that only along that path does the possibility of discovering the laws of history lie, and that as yet not a millionth part as much mental effort has been applied in this direction by historians as has been devoted to describing the actions of various kings, commanders, and ministers and propounding the historians' own reflections concerning these actions. . . .

Our false conception that an event is caused by a command which precedes it is due to the fact that when the event has taken place and not of thousands of others those few commands which were consistent with that event have been executed, we forget about the others that were not executed because they could not be. Apart from that, the chief source of our error in this matter is due to the fact that in the historical accounts a whole series of innumerable, diverse, and petty events, such for instance as all those which led the French armies to Russia, is generalized into one event in accord with the result produced by that series of events, and corresponding with this generalization the whole series of commands is also generalized into a single expression of will.

We say that Napoleon wished to invade Russia and invaded it. In



reality in all Napoleon's activity we never find anything resembling an expression of that wish, but find a series of orders, or expressions of his will, very variously and indefinitely directed. Amid a long series of unexecuted orders of Napoleon's one series, for the campaign of 1812, was carried out—not because those orders differed in any way from the other, unexecuted orders but because they coincided with the course of events that led the French army into Russia; just as in stenciled work this or that figure comes out not because the color was laid on from this side or in that way, but because it was laid on from all sides over the figure cut in the stencil. . . .

With the present complex forms of political and social life in Europe can any event that is not prescribed, decreed, or ordered by monarchs, ministers, parliaments, or newspapers be imagined? Is there any collective action which cannot find its justification in political unity, in patriotism, in the balance of power, or in civilization? So that every event that occurs inevitably coincides with some expressed wish and, receiving a justification, presents itself as the result of the will of one man or of several men.

In whatever direction a ship moves, the flow of the waves it cuts will always be noticeable ahead of it. To those on board the ship the movement of those waves will be the only perceptible motion.

Only by watching closely moment by moment the movement of that flow and comparing it with the movement of the ship do we convince ourselves that every bit of it is occasioned by the forward movement of the ship, and that we were led into error by the fact that we ourselves were imperceptibly moving.

We see the same if we watch moment by moment the movement of historical characters (that is, re-establish the inevitable condition of all that occurs—the continuity of movement in time) and do not lose sight of the essential connection of historical persons with the masses.

When the ship moves in one direction there is one and the same wave ahead of it, when it turns frequently the wave ahead of it also turns frequently. But wherever it may turn there always will be the wave anticipating its movement.

Whatever happens it always appears that just that event was foreseen and decreed. Wherever the ship may go, the rush of water which neither directs nor increases its movement foams ahead of it, and at a distance seems to us not merely to move of itself but to govern the ship's movement also.

Examining only those expressions of the will of historical persons which, as commands, were related to events, historians have assumed that the events depended on those commands. But examining the events themselves and the connection in which the historical persons stood to the people, we have found that they and their orders were dependent on events. The incontestable proof of this deduction is that, however many commands were issued, the event does not take place unless there are other causes for it, but as soon as an event occurs—be it what it may—

then out of all the continually expressed wishes of different people some will always be found which by their meaning and their time of utterance are related as commands to the events.

Arriving at this conclusion we can reply directly and positively to these two essential questions of history:

(1) What is power?

(2) What force produces the movement of the nations?

(1) Power is the relation of a given person to other individuals, in which the more this person expresses opinions, predictions, and justifications of the collective action that is performed, the less is his participation in that action.

(2) The movement of nations is caused not by power, nor by intellectual activity, nor even by a combination of the two as historians have supposed, but by the activity of *all* the people who participate in the events, and who always combine in such a way that those taking the largest direct share in the event take on themselves the least responsibility and vice versa.

Morally the wielder of power appears to cause the event; physically it is those who submit to the power. But as the moral activity is inconceivable without the physical, the cause of the event is neither in the one nor in the other but in the union of the two.

Or in other words, the conception of a cause is inapplicable to the phenomena we are examining.

In the last analysis we reach the circle of infinity—that final limit to which in every domain of thought man's reason arrives if it is not playing with the subject. Electricity produces heat, heat produces electricity. Atoms attract each other and atoms repel one another.

Speaking of the interaction of heat and electricity and of atoms, we cannot say why this occurs, and we say that it is so because it is inconceivable otherwise, because it must be so and that it is a law. The same applies to historical events. Why war and revolution occur we do not know. We only know that to produce the one or the other action, people combine in a certain formation in which they all take part, and we say that this is so because it is unthinkable otherwise, or in other words that it is a law.

## 2. The Problem of Free Will and Necessity

[Having, in his opinion, exploded all conceptions of history which locate the determining causes of historical change in the wills of out-

standing persons, Tolstoy goes on to discuss the implications of his general theory for the problem of human "free will."]

If History dealt only with external phenomena, the establishment of this simple and obvious law would suffice and we should have finished our argument. But the law of history relates to man. A particle of matter cannot tell us that it does not feel the law of attraction or repulsion and that that law is untrue, but man, who is the subject of history, says plainly: I am free and am therefore not subject to the law.

The presence of the problem of man's free will, though unexpressed, is felt at every step of history.

All seriously thinking historians have involuntarily encountered this question. All the contradictions and obscurities of history, and the false path historical science has followed, are due solely to the lack of a solution of that question.

If the will of every man were free, that is, if each man could act as he pleased, all history would be a series of disconnected incidents.

If in a thousand years even one man in a million could act freely, that is, as he chose, it is evident that one single free act of that man's in violation of the laws governing human action would destroy the possibility of the existence of any laws for the whole of humanity.

If there be a single law governing the actions of men, free will cannot exist, for then man's will is subject to that law.

In this contradiction lies the problem of free will, which from most ancient times has occupied the best human minds and from most ancient times has been presented in its whole tremendous significance.

The problem is that regarding man as a subject of observation from whatever point of view—theological, historical, ethical, or philosophic—we find a general law of necessity to which he (like all that exists) is subject. But regarding him from within ourselves as what we are conscious of, we feel ourselves to be free.

This consciousness is a source of self-cognition quite apart from and independent of reason. Through his reason man observes himself, but only through consciousness does he know himself.

Apart from consciousness of self no observation or application of reason is conceivable.

To understand, observe, and draw conclusions, man must first of all be conscious of himself as living. A man is only conscious of himself as a living being by the fact that he wills, that is, is conscious of his volition. But his will—which forms the essence of his life—man recognizes (and can but recognize) as free.

If, observing himself, man sees that his will is always directed by one and the same law (whether he observes the necessity of taking food, using his brain, or anything else) he cannot recognize this never-varying direction of his will otherwise than as a limitation of it. Were it not free it

could not be limited. A man's will seems to him to be limited just because he is not conscious of it except as free.

You say: I am not free. But I have lifted my hand and let it fall. Everyone understands that this illogical reply is an irrefutable demonstration of freedom.

That reply is the expression of a consciousness that is not subject to reason.

If the consciousness of freedom were not a separate and independent source of self-consciousness it would be subject to reasoning and to experience, but in fact such subjection does not exist and is inconceivable.

A series of experiments and arguments proves to every man that he, as an object of observation, is subject to certain laws, and man submits to them and never resists the laws of gravity or impermeability once he has become acquainted with them. But the same series of experiments and arguments proves to him that the complete freedom of which he is conscious in himself is impossible, and that his every action depends on his organization, his character, and the motives acting upon him; yet man never submits to the deductions of these experiments and arguments. Having learned from experiment and argument that a stone falls downwards, a man indubitably believes this and always expects the law that he has learned to be fulfilled.

But learning just as certainly that his will is subject to laws, he does not and cannot believe this.

However often experiment and reasoning may show a man that under the same conditions and with the same character he will do the same thing as before, yet when under the same conditions and with the same character he approaches for the thousandth time the action that always ends in the same way, he feels as certainly convinced as before the experiment that he can act as he pleases. Every man, savage or sage, however incontestably reason and experiment may prove to him that it is impossible to imagine two different courses of action in precisely the same conditions, feels that without this irrational conception (which constitutes the essence of freedom) he cannot imagine life. He feels that however impossible it may be, it is so, for without this conception of freedom not only would he be unable to understand life, but he would be unable to live for a single moment.

He could not live, because all man's efforts, all his impulses to life, are only efforts to increase freedom. Wealth and poverty, fame and obscurity, power and subordination, strength and weakness, health and disease, culture and ignorance, work and leisure, repletion and hunger, virtue and vice, are only greater or lesser degrees of freedom.

A man having no freedom cannot be conceived of except as deprived of life.

If the conception of freedom appears to reason to be a senseless contradiction like the possibility of performing two actions at one and the same

instant of time, or of an effect without a cause, that only proves that consciousness is not subject to reason.

This unshakable, irrefutable consciousness of freedom, uncontrolled by experiment or argument, recognized by all thinkers and felt by everyone without exception, this consciousness without which no conception of man is possible constitutes the other side of the question.

Man is the creation of an all-powerful, all-good, and all-seeing God. What is sin, the conception of which arises from the consciousness of man's freedom? That is a question for theology.

The actions of men are subject to general immutable laws expressed in statistics. What is man's responsibility to society, the conception of which results from the conception of freedom? That is a question for jurisprudence.

Man's actions proceed from his innate character and the motives acting upon him. What is conscience and the perception of right and wrong in actions that follows from the consciousness of freedom? That is a question for ethics.

Man in connection with the general life of humanity appears subject to laws which determine that life. But the same man apart from that connection appears to be free. How should the past life of nations and of humanity be regarded—as the result of the free, or as the result of the constrained, activity of man? That is a question for history.

Only in our self-confident day of the popularization of knowledge—thanks to that most powerful engine of ignorance, the diffusion of printed matter—has the question of the freedom of will been put on a level on which the question itself cannot exist. In our time the majority of so-called advanced people—that is, the crowd of ignoramuses—have taken the work of the naturalists who deal with one side of the question for a solution of the whole problem.

They say and write and print that the soul and freedom do not exist, for the life of man is expressed by muscular movements and muscular movements are conditioned by the activity of the nerves; the soul and free will do not exist because at an unknown period of time we sprang from the apes. They say this, not at all suspecting that thousands of years ago that same law of necessity which with such ardor they are now trying to prove by physiology and comparative zoology was not merely acknowledged by all the religions and all the thinkers, but has never been denied. They do not see that the role of the natural sciences in this matter is merely to serve as an instrument for the illumination of one side of it. For the fact that, from the point of view of observation, reason and the will are merely secretions of the brain, and that man following the general law may have developed from lower animals at some unknown period of time, only explains from a fresh side the truth admitted thousands of years ago by all the religious and philosophic theories—that from the point of view of reason man is subject to the law of necessity; but it does not advance by a hair's breadth the solution of the question, which has another, opposite, side, based on the consciousness of freedom.

If men descended from the apes at an unknown period of time, that is as comprehensible as that they were made from a handful of earth at a certain period of time (in the first case the unknown quantity is the time, in the second case it is the origin); and the question of how man's consciousness of freedom is to be reconciled with the law of necessity to which he is subject cannot be solved by comparative physiology and zoology, for in a frog, a rabbit, or an ape, we can observe only the muscular nervous activity, but in man we observe consciousness as well as the muscular and nervous activity.

The naturalists and their followers, thinking they can solve this question, are like plasterers set to plaster one side of the walls of a church who, availing themselves of the absence of the chief superintendent of the work, should in an access of zeal plaster over the windows, icons, woodwork, and still unbuttressed walls, and should be delighted that from their point of view as plasterers, everything is now so smooth and regular.

For the solution of the question of free will or inevitability, history has this advantage over other branches of knowledge in which the question is dealt with, that for history this question does not refer to the essence of man's free will but to its manifestation in the past and under certain conditions.

In regard to this question, history stands to the other sciences as experimental science stands to abstract science.

The subject for history is not man's will itself but our presentation of it.

And so for history, the insoluble mystery presented by the incompatibility of free will and inevitability does not exist as it does for theology, ethics, and philosophy. History surveys a presentation of man's life in which the union of these two contradictions has already taken place.

In actual life each historic event, each human action, is very clearly and definitely understood without any sense of contradiction, although each event presents itself as partly free and partly compulsory.

To solve the question of how freedom and necessity are combined and what constitutes the essence of these two conceptions, the philosophy of history can and should follow a path contrary to that taken by other sciences. Instead of first defining the conceptions of freedom and inevitability in themselves, and then ranging the phenomena of life under those definitions, history should deduce a definition of the conception of freedom and inevitability themselves from the immense quantity of phenomena of which it is cognizant and that always appear dependent on these two elements.

Whatever presentation of the activity of many men or of an individual we may consider, we always regard it as the result partly of man's free will and partly of the law of inevitability.

Whether we speak of the migration of the peoples and the incursions of the barbarians, or of the decrees of Napoleon III, or of someone's action an hour ago in choosing one direction out of several for his walk, we are unconscious of any contradiction. The degree of freedom and inevitability governing the actions of these people is clearly defined for us.

Our conception of the degree of freedom often varies according to differences in the point of view from which we regard the event, but every human action appears to us as a certain combination of freedom and inevitability. In every action we examine we see a certain measure of freedom and a certain measure of inevitability. And always the more freedom we see in any action the less inevitability do we perceive, and the more inevitability the less freedom.

The proportion of freedom to inevitability decreases and increases according to the point of view from which the action is regarded, but their relation is always one of inverse proportion.

A sinking man who clutches at another and drowns him; or a hungry mother exhausted by feeding her baby, who steals some food; or a man trained to discipline who on duty at the word of command kills a defenseless man—seem less guilty, that is, less free and more subject to the law of necessity, to one who knows the circumstances in which these people were placed, and more free to one who does not know that the man was himself drowning, that the mother was hungry, that the soldier was in the ranks, and so on. Similarly a man who committed a murder twenty years ago and has since lived peaceably and harmlessly in society seems less guilty and his action more due to the law of inevitability, to someone who considers his action after twenty years have elapsed than to one who examined it the day after it was committed. And in the same way every action of an insane, intoxicated, or highly excited man appears less free and more inevitable to one who knows the mental condition of him who committed the action, and seems more free and less inevitable to one who does not know it. In all these cases the conception of freedom is increased or diminished and the conception of compulsion is correspondingly decreased or increased, according to the point of view from which the action is regarded. So that the greater the conception of necessity the smaller the conception of freedom and vice versa.

Religion, the common sense of mankind, the science of jurisprudence, and history itself understand alike this relation between necessity and freedom.

All cases without exception in which our conception of freedom and necessity is increased and diminished depend on three considerations:

(1) The relation to the external world of the man who commits the deeds.

(2) His relation to time.

(3) His relation to the causes leading to the action.

The first consideration is the clearness of our perception of the man's relation to the external world and the greater or lesser clearness of our understanding of the definite position occupied by the man in relation to everything coexisting with him. This is what makes it evident that a drowning man is less free and more subject to necessity than one standing on dry ground, and that makes the actions of a man closely connected with others in a thickly populated district, or of one bound by family, official,

or business duties, seem certainly less free and more subject to necessity than those of a man living in solitude and seclusion.

If we consider a man alone, apart from his relation to everything around him, each action of his seems to us free. But if we see his relation to anything around him, if we see his connection with anything whatever—with a man who speaks to him, a book he reads, the work on which he is engaged, even with the air he breathes or the light that falls on the things about him—we see that each of these circumstances has an influence on him and controls at least some side of his activity. And the more we perceive of these influences the more our conception of his freedom diminishes and the more our conception of the necessity that weighs on him increases.

The second consideration is the more or less evident time relation of the man to the world and the clearness of our perception of the place the man's action occupies in time. That is the ground which makes the fall of the first man, resulting in the production of the human race, appear evidently less free than a man's entry into marriage today. It is the reason why the life and activity of people who lived centuries ago and are connected with me in time cannot seem to me as free as the life of a contemporary, the consequences of which are still unknown to me.

The degree of our conception of freedom or inevitability depends in this respect on the greater or lesser lapse of time between the performance of the action and our judgment of it.

If I examine an act I performed a moment ago in approximately the same circumstances as those I am in now, my action appears to me undoubtedly free. But if I examine an act performed a month ago, then being in different circumstances, I cannot help recognizing that if that act had not been committed much that resulted from it—good, agreeable, and even essential—would not have taken place. If I reflect on an action still more remote, ten years ago or more, then the consequences of my action are still plainer to me and I find it hard to imagine what would have happened had that action not been performed. The farther I go back in memory, or what is the same thing the farther I go forward in my judgment, the more doubtful becomes my belief in the freedom of any action.

In history we find a very similar progress of conviction concerning the part played by free will in the general affairs of humanity. A contemporary event seems to us to be indubitably the doing of all the known participants, but with a more remote event we already see its inevitable results which prevent our considering anything else possible. And the farther we go back in examining events the less arbitrary do they appear.

The Austro-Prussian war\* appears to us undoubtedly the result of the crafty conduct of Bismarck, and so on. The Napoleonic wars still seem to us, though already questionably, to be the outcome of their heroes' will. But in the Crusades we already see an event occupying its definite place

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\*The Austro-Prussian war of 1866 occurred while Tolstoy was writing this novel.  
(Translator's Note)



in history and without which we cannot imagine the modern history of Europe, though to the chroniclers of the Crusades that event appeared as merely due to the will of certain people. In regard to the migration of the peoples it does not enter anyone's head today to suppose that the renovation of the European world depended on Attila's caprice. The farther back in history the object of our observation lies, the more doubtful does the free will of those concerned in the event become and the more manifest the law of inevitability.

The third consideration is the degree to which we apprehend that endless chain of causation inevitably demanded by reason, in which each phenomenon comprehended, and therefore man's every action, must have its definite place as a result of what has gone before and as a cause of what will follow.

The better we are acquainted with the physiological, psychological, and historical laws deduced by observation and by which man is controlled, and the more correctly we perceive the physiological, psychological, and historical causes of the action, and the simpler the action we are observing and the less complex the character and mind of the man in question, the more subject to inevitability and the less free do our actions and those of others appear.

When we do not at all understand the cause of an action, whether a crime, a good action, or even one that is simply nonmoral, we ascribe a greater amount of freedom to it. In the case of a crime we most urgently demand the punishment for such an act; in the case of a virtuous act we rate its merit most highly. In an indifferent case we recognize in it more individuality, originality, and independence. But if even one of the innumerable causes of the act is known to us we recognize a certain element of necessity and are less insistent on punishment for the crime, or the acknowledgment of the merit of the virtuous act, or the freedom of the apparently original action. That a criminal was reared among malefactors mitigates his fault in our eyes. The self-sacrifice of a father or mother, or self-sacrifice with the possibility of a reward, is more comprehensible than gratuitous self-sacrifice, and therefore seems less deserving of sympathy and less the result of free will. The founder of a sect or party, or an inventor, impresses us less when we know how or by what the way was prepared for his activity. If we have a large range of examples, if our observation is constantly directed to seeking the correlation of cause and effect in people's actions, their actions appear to us more under compulsion and less free the more correctly we connect the effects with the causes. If we examined simple actions and had a vast number of such actions under observation, our conception of their inevitability would be still greater. The dishonest conduct of the son of a dishonest father, the misconduct of a woman who had fallen into bad company, a drunkard's relapse into drunkenness, and so on are actions that seem to us less free the better we understand their cause. If the man whose actions we are considering is on a very low stage of mental development, like a child, a madman, or a simpleton—then,

knowing the causes of the act and the simplicity of the character and intelligence in question, we see so large an element of necessity and so little free will that as soon as we know the cause prompting the action we can foretell the result.

On these three considerations alone is based the conception of irresponsibility for crimes and the extenuating circumstances admitted by all legislative codes. The responsibility appears greater or less according to our greater or lesser knowledge of the circumstances in which the man was placed whose action is being judged, and according to the greater or lesser interval of time between the commission of the action and its investigation, and according to the greater or lesser understanding of the causes that led to the action. . . .

History examines the manifestations of man's free will in connection with the external world in time and in dependence on cause, that is, it defines this freedom by the laws of reason, and so history is a science only in so far as this free will is defined by those laws.

The recognition of man's free will as something capable of influencing historical events, that is, as not subject to laws, is the same for history as the recognition of a free force moving the heavenly bodies would be for astronomy.

That assumption would destroy the possibility of the existence of laws, that is, of any science whatever. If there is even a single body moving freely, then the laws of Kepler and Newton are negated and no conception of the movement of the heavenly bodies any longer exists. If any single action is due to free will, then not a single historical law can exist, nor any conception of historical events.

For history, lines exist of the movement of human wills, one end of which is hidden in the unknown but at the other end of which a consciousness of man's will in the present moves in space, time, and dependence on cause.

The more this field of motion spreads out before our eyes, the more evident are the laws of that movement. To discover and define those laws is the problem of history.

From the standpoint from which the science of history now regards its subject on the path it now follows, seeking the causes of events in man's free will, a scientific enunciation of those laws is impossible, for however man's free will may be restricted, as soon as we recognize it as a force not subject to law, the existence of law becomes impossible.

Only by reducing this element of free will to the infinitesimal, that is, by regarding it as an infinitely small quantity, can we convince ourselves of the absolute inaccessibility of the causes, and then instead of seeking causes, history will take the discovery of laws as its problem.

The search for these laws has long been begun and the new methods of thought which history must adopt are being worked out simultaneously with the self-destruction toward which—ever dissecting and dissecting the causes of phenomena—the old method of history is moving.

All human sciences have travelled along that path. Arriving at infinitesimals, mathematics, the most exact of sciences, abandons the process of analysis and enters on the new process of the integration of unknown, infinitely small, quantities. Abandoning the conception of cause, mathematics seeks law, that is, the property common to all unknown, infinitely small, elements.

In another form but along the same path of reflection the other sciences have proceeded. When Newton enunciated the law of gravity he did not say that the sun or the earth had a property of attraction; he said that all bodies from the largest to the smallest have the property of attracting one another, that is, leaving aside the question of the cause of the movement of the bodies, he expressed the property common to all bodies from the infinitely large to the infinitely small. The same is done by the natural sciences: leaving aside the question of cause, they seek for laws. History stands on the same path. And if history has for its object the study of the movement of the nations and of humanity and not the narration of episodes in the lives of individuals, it too, setting aside the conception of cause, should seek the laws common to all the inseparably interconnected infinitesimal elements of free will.

From the time the law of Copernicus was discovered and proved, the mere recognition of the fact that it was not the sun but the earth that moves sufficed to destroy the whole cosmography of the ancients. By disproving that law it might have been possible to retain the old conception of the movements of the bodies, but without disproving it, it would seem impossible to continue studying the Ptolemaic worlds. But even after the discovery of the law of Copernicus the Ptolemaic worlds were still studied for a long time.

From the time the first person said and proved that the number of births or of crimes is subject to mathematical laws, and that this or that mode of government is determined by certain geographical and economic conditions, and that certain relations of population to soil produce migrations of peoples, the foundations on which history had been built were destroyed in their essence.

By refuting these new laws the former view of history might have been retained; but without refuting them it would seem impossible to continue studying historic events as the results of man's free will. For if a certain mode of government was established or certain migrations of peoples took place in consequence of such and such geographic, ethnographic, or economic conditions, then the free will of those individuals who appear to us to have established that mode of government or occasioned the migrations can no longer be regarded as the cause.

And yet the former history continues to be studied side by side with the laws of statistics, geography, political economy, comparative philology, and geology, which directly contradict its assumptions.

The struggle between the old views and the new was long and stub-

bornly fought out in physical philosophy. Theology stood on guard for the old views and accused the new of violating revelation. But when truth conquered, theology established itself just as firmly on the new foundation.

Just as prolonged and stubborn is the struggle now proceeding between the old and the new conception of history, and theology in the same way stands on guard for the old view, and accuses the new view of subverting revelation.

In the one case as in the other, on both sides the struggle provokes passion and stifles truth. On the one hand there is fear and regret for the loss of the whole edifice constructed through the ages, on the other is the passion for destruction.

To the men who fought against the rising truths of physical philosophy, it seemed that if they admitted that truth it would destroy faith in God, in the creation of the firmament, and in the miracle of Joshua the son of Nun. To the defenders of the laws of Copernicus and Newton, to Voltaire for example, it seemed that the laws of astronomy destroyed religion, and he utilized the law of gravitation as a weapon against religion.

Just so it now seems as if we have only to admit the law of inevitability, to destroy the conception of the soul, of good and evil, and all the institutions of state and church that have been built up on those conceptions.

So too, like Voltaire in his time, uninvited defenders of the law of inevitability today use that law as a weapon against religion, though the law of inevitability in history, like the law of Copernicus in astronomy, far from destroying, even strengthens the foundation on which the institutions of state and church are erected.

As in the question of astronomy then, so in the question of history now, the whole difference of opinion is based on the recognition or nonrecognition of something absolute, serving as the measure of visible phenomena. In astronomy it was the immovability of the earth, in history it is the independence of personality—free will.

As with astronomy the difficulty of recognizing the motion of the earth lay in abandoning the immediate sensation of the earth's fixity and of the motion of the planets, so in history the difficulty of recognizing the subjection of personality to the laws of space, time, and cause lies in renouncing the direct feeling of the independence of one's own personality. But as in astronomy the new view said: "It is true that we do not feel the movement of the earth, but by admitting its immobility we arrive at absurdity, while by admitting its motion (which we do not feel) we arrive at laws," so also in history the new view says: "It is true that we are not conscious of our dependence, but by admitting our free will we arrive at absurdity, while by admitting our dependence on the external world, on time, and on cause, we arrive at laws."

In the first case it was necessary to renounce the consciousness of an unreal immobility in space and to recognize a motion we did not feel; in the present case it is similarly necessary to renounce a freedom that does not exist, and to recognize a dependence of which we are not conscious.

## SPENGLER (1880-1936)

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OSWALD SPENGLER was born at Blankenburg in 1880, the son of a postal official. He attended three universities—Munich, Berlin, and Halle, where he studied mathematics and natural science. After several years as a schoolmaster, he finally gave up teaching in 1911. In that year the main ideas that inspired *The Decline of the West* took shape in his mind, and from then onwards he applied himself to developing them. A draft of the book was complete in 1914; three years later the first volume was published, the second volume appearing in 1922. From then until his death in 1936, Spengler was engaged in sporadic political activity and wrote a number of short books and pamphlets on political and social subjects, in which he advocated a rather depressing form of bureaucratic fascism.

Although in *The Decline of the West* Spengler appears to adopt an attitude of Olympian detachment towards the spectacle of human history, an air of bleak fanaticism nevertheless pervades his book; the reader is not left in doubt concerning what human qualities the author admires or what conditions he would like to see realized. Instinct is favored as opposed to understanding, the life of the soil as opposed to the life of the city, faith and reverence for tradition as opposed to rational calculation and self-interest, intuitive insight and imagination as opposed to analysis and scientific method. These antitheses were incorporated by Spengler in larger and vaguer ones—Destiny against Causality, Culture against Civilization, History against Nature, Growth and Life against Decay and Death. The signs of decline in our present civilization are delineated with an almost gloating care, the “quiet firm step” of approaching “Caesarism” heralded with a grim satisfaction.

While being in many ways a pretentious and theoretically muddled work, *The Decline of the West* is nevertheless not without a certain arresting power. Spengler said that he owed practically everything to Nietzsche and Goethe, but whatever ideas he may have derived from other writers are presented in a highly individual form. The notion of historical recurrence, for example, appears in Spengler's work in the shape of a “morphological” conception of history as exhibiting the continual emergence and dissolution of different cultures. These cultures have a limited life-span (1,000 years is given as an approximate figure) and each proceeds through a regular series of stages, the analogy being, of course, with living organisms such as plants. This picture of historical development is set against the established view of history as a linear progression divided under three main headings, “Ancient,” “Mediaeval,” and “Modern”—a view which Spengler treats with the greatest contempt. Each culture has its own specific character or “soul” (a Herder-like conception), but all are subject to the same inescapable destiny; all are “mortal” and all are fated to pursue an essentially similar course, passing

from a period of growth into the phase of "civilization" which precedes final extinction. Of the cultures that have already emerged during the course of history, Spengler lists eight: the Egyptian, the Chinese, the Ancient Semitic, the Indian, the Magian, the Apollinian (or Greco-Roman "Classical" civilization) and, finally, the "Faustian" or Western, which roughly covers the period of European history during the last thousand years. It is the last two of these that he chiefly considers; and a comparison between them leads him to the conclusion that the creative phase of our own culture has passed and that in the foreseeable future "the history of West-European mankind will be definitely closed."

Spengler's study is undertaken with very definite epistemological presuppositions. There is no such thing as "absolute truth." Truth is a concept relative to particular cultural standpoints, and hence no judgment, whether moral, mathematical, aesthetic or philosophical, can have "eternal" validity—although Spengler showed a certain inconsistency here in not always appearing to recognize the implications of such a principle for the validity of his own doctrines.\* Further, he believed that the investigation of historical phenomena could not be done by adopting procedures of the type used by natural scientists. Historical knowledge is of a unique kind, and much that he says in this connection is (somewhat incongruously) reminiscent of the views of "idealist" philosophers of history like Croce. According to Spengler, the essential concepts of natural science are the concepts of causal uniformity and measurability, and the "natural world," the structure of which is fixed and stable, presents the appropriate field for the application of these. The subject matter of history, on the other hand, comprehends the "becoming" as contrasted with the "become"; all is flux, development, variety, particularity, life; to imagine that it can be interpreted in terms of quantitative formulae or construed as a quasi-mechanical system is consequently absurd. History is held to require its own proper mode of "apprehension," which Spengler describes as "physiognomic"; as the following extracts make clear, he believed that the true nature of his "cultures," like everything else historical, must be grasped by perceptive genius, by insight, as an artist may be said to capture the character and quality of his sitter. The true historian, Spengler insists again and again, cannot hope to interpret his material by employing methods which rely upon generalization and induction and can be learnt as a result of training; historical understanding is innate and creative, and truly historical works are those which succeed in expressing the inner life and "meaning" of their subjects. In spite of Spengler's rhapsodic language the drift of what he says on this point is clear and has a certain interest. It is clearly directed largely against the positivistic and "scientific" ideas which, since Comte, had infected a great deal of late nineteenth-century historiography and historical theory.

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\*In the "Preface" to the revised edition of his book, however, Spengler said that what he had written was true for him but "not true in itself as dissociated from the conditions imposed by blood and by history, for that is impossible."

**The World-as-History\***

*The World-as-Nature and the World-as-History.* In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of pre-determining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfilment—the West-European-American.

Hitherto the possibility of solving a problem so far-reaching has evidently never been envisaged, and even if it had been so, the means of dealing with it were either altogether unsuspected, or, at best, inadequately used.

Is there a logic of history? Is there, beyond all the casual and incalculable elements of the separate events, something that we may call a metaphysical structure of historic humanity, something that is essentially independent of the outward forms—social, spiritual and political—which we see so clearly? Are not these actualities indeed secondary or derived from that something? Does world-history present to the seeing eye certain grand traits, again and again, with sufficient constancy to justify certain conclusions? And if so, what are the limits to which reasoning from such premises may be pushed?

Is it possible to find in life itself—for human history is the sum of mighty life-courses which already have had to be endowed with ego and personality, in customary thought and expression, by predicating entities of a higher order like "the Classical" or "the Chinese Culture," "Modern Civilization"—a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence? For everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime are fundamentals—may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?

The decline of the West, which at first sight may appear, like the corresponding decline of the Classical Culture, a phenomenon limited in time and space, we now perceive to be a philosophical problem that, when comprehended in all its gravity, includes within itself every great question of Being . . .

Thus our theme, which originally comprised only the limited problem of present-day civilization, broadens itself into a new philosophy—the philosophy of the future, so far as the metaphysically-exhausted soil of the West can bear such, and in any case the only philosophy which is within the *possibilities* of the West-European mind in its next stages. It

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expands into the conception of a morphology of world history, of the world-as-history in contrast to the morphology of the world-as-nature that hitherto has been almost the only theme of philosophy. And it reviews once again the forms and movements of the world in their depths and final significance, but this time according to an entirely different ordering which groups them not in an ensemble picture of everything known, but in a picture of *life*, and presents them not as things-become, but as things-becoming.

The *world-as-history*, conceived, viewed and given form from out of its opposite the *world-as-nature*—here is a new aspect of human existence on this earth. As yet, in spite of its immense significance, both practical and theoretical, this aspect has not been realized, still less presented. Some obscure inkling of it there may have been, a distant momentary glimpse there has often been, but no one has deliberately faced it and taken it in with all its implications. We have before us two possible ways in which man may inwardly possess and experience the world around him. With all rigour I distinguish (as to form, not substance) the organic from the mechanical world-impression, the content of images from that of laws, the picture and symbol from the formula and the system, the instantly actual from the constantly possible, the intents and purposes of imagination ordering according to plan from the intents and purposes of experience dissecting according to scheme; and—to mention even thus early an opposition that has never yet been noted, in spite of its significance—the domain of *chronological* from that of *mathematical number*.

Consequently, in a research such as that lying before us, there can be no question of taking spiritual-political events, as they become visible day by day on the surface, at their face value, and arranging them on a scheme of “causes” or “effects” and following them up in the obvious and intellectually easy directions. Such a “pragmatic” handling of history would be nothing but a piece of “natural science” in disguise, and for their part, the supporters of the materialistic idea of history make no secret about it—it is their adversaries who largely fail to see the similarity of the two methods. What concerns us is not what the historical facts which appear at this or that time are, *per se*, but what they signify, what they point to, *by appearing*. Present-day historians think they are doing a work of supererogation in bringing in religious or social, or still more art-history, details to “illustrate” the political sense of an epoch. But the decisive factor—decisive, that is, in so far as visible history is the expression, sign and embodiment of soul—they forget. I have not hitherto found one who has carefully considered the *morphological relationship* that inwardly binds together the expression-forms of all branches of a Culture, who has gone beyond politics to grasp the ultimate and fundamental ideas of Greeks, Arabians, Indians and Westerners in mathematics, the meaning of their early ornamentation, the basic forms of their architecture, philosophies, dramas and lyrics, their choice and development of great arts, the detail of their craftsmanship and choice of materials—let alone appreciated the



decisive importance of these matters for the form-problems of history. Who amongst them realizes that between the Differential Calculus and the dynastic principles of politics in the age of Louis XIV, between the Classical city-state and the Euclidian geometry, between the space-perspective of Western oil-painting and the conquest of space by railroad, telephone and long-range weapon, between contrapuntal music and credit economics, there are deep uniformities? . . .

But at once the fact presents itself that as yet there exists no theory-enlightened art of historical treatment. What passes as such draws its methods almost exclusively from the domain of that science which alone has completely disciplined the methods of cognition, viz., physics, and thus we imagine ourselves to be carrying on historical research when we are really following out objective connections of cause and effect. It is a remarkable fact that the old-fashioned philosophy never imagined even the possibility of there being any other relation than this between the conscious human understanding and the world outside. Kant, who in his main work established the formal rules of cognition, took *nature* only as the object of reason's activity, and neither he himself, nor anyone after him, noted the reservation. Knowledge, for Kant, is mathematical knowledge. He deals with innate intuition-forms and categories of the reason, but he never thinks of the wholly different mechanism by which historical impressions are apprehended. And Schopenhauer, who, significantly enough, retains but one of the Kantian categories, viz., causality, speaks contemptuously of history. That there is, besides a necessity of cause and effect—which I may call the *logic of space*—another necessity, an organic necessity in life, that of *Destiny*—the *logic of time*—is a fact of the deepest inward certainty, a fact which suffuses the whole of mythological religions and artistic thought and constitutes the essence and kernel of all history (in contradistinction to nature) but is unapproachable through the cognition-forms which the *Critique of Pure Reason* investigates. This fact still awaits its theoretical formulation. As Galileo says in a famous passage of his *Saggiatore*, philosophy, as Nature's great book, is written "in mathematical language." We await, today, the philosopher who will tell us in what language history is written and how it is to be read.

Mathematics and the principle of Causality lead to a naturalistic, Chronology and the idea of Destiny to a historical ordering of the phenomenal world. Both orderings, each on its own account, cover the *whole* world. The difference is only in the eyes by which and through which this world is realized. . . .

*The "Ptolemaic" System of History.* Thanks to the subdivision of history into "Ancient," "Medieval" and "Modern"—an incredibly jejune and *meaningless* scheme, which has, however, entirely dominated our historical thinking—we have failed to perceive the true position in the general history of higher mankind, of the little part-world which has developed on West-European soil from the time of the German-Roman Empire, to judge of its relative importance and above all to estimate its direction. The Cultures that are to come will find it difficult to believe that the validity of such a scheme with its simple rectilinear progression and its meaningless proportions, be-

coming more and more preposterous each century, incapable of bringing into itself the new fields of history as they successively come into the light of our knowledge, was, in spite of all, never whole-heartedly attacked. The criticisms that it has long been the fashion of historical researchers to level at the scheme mean nothing; they have only obliterated the one existing plan without substituting for it any other. To toy with phrases such as "the Greek Middle Ages" or "Germanic antiquity" does not in the least help us to form a clear and inwardly-convincing picture in which China and Mexico, the empire of Axum and that of the Sassanids have their proper places. And the expedient of shifting the initial point of "modern history" from the Crusades to the Renaissance, or from the Renaissance to the beginning of the 19th Century, only goes to show that the scheme *per se* is regarded as unshakably sound.

It is not only that the scheme circumscribes the area of history. What is worse, it rigs the stage. The ground of West Europe is treated as a steady pole, a unique patch chosen on the surface of the sphere for no better reason, it seems, than because we live on it—and great histories of millennial duration and mighty far-away Cultures are made to revolve around this pole in all modesty. It is a quaintly conceived system of sun and planets! We select a single bit of ground as the natural center of the historical system, and make it the central sun. From it all the events of history receive their real light, from it their importance is judged in *perspective*. But it is in our own West-European conceit alone that this phantom "world-history," which a breath of skepticism would dissipate, is acted out. . . .

The most appropriate designation for this current West-European scheme of history, in which the great Cultures are made to follow orbits round us as the presumed center of all world-happenings, is the *Ptolemaic system* of history. The system that is put forward in this work in place of it I regard as the *Copernican discovery* in the historical sphere, in that it admits no sort of privileged position to the Classical or the Western Culture as against the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, Mexico—separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in the general picture of history as the Classical, while frequently surpassing it in point of spiritual greatness and soaring power. . . .

The term, "modern times," which in form asserts that it is the last and conclusive term of the series, has in fact, ever since the Crusades, been stretched and stretched again to the elastic limit at which it will bear no more. It was at least implied if not stated in so many words, that here, beyond the ancient and the medieval, something definitive was beginning, a Third Kingdom in which, somewhere, there was to be fulfillment and culmination, and which had an objective point.

As to what this objective point is, each thinker, from Schoolman to present-day Socialist, backs his own peculiar discovery. Such a view into the course of things may be both easy and flattering to the patentee, but in fact he has simply taken the spirit of the West, as reflected in his own brain, for the meaning of the world. So it is that great thinkers, making a meta-physical virtue of intellectual necessity, have not only accepted without serious investigation the scheme of history agreed by "common consent" but

have made of it the basis of their philosophies and dragged in God as the author of this or that "world-plan." Evidently the mystic number three applied to the world-ages has something highly seductive for the metaphysician's taste. History was described by Herder as the education of the human race, by Kant as an evolution of the idea of freedom, by Hegel as a self-expansion of the world-spirit, by others in other terms, but as regards its ground-plan everyone was quite satisfied when he had thought out some abstract meaning for the conventional threefold order. . . .

"Mankind," however, has no aim, no idea, no plan, any more than the family of butterflies or orchids. "Mankind" is a zoological expression, or an empty word.<sup>1</sup> But conjure away the phantom, break the magic circle, and at once there emerges an astonishing wealth of *actual* forms—the Living with all its immense fullness, depth and movement—hitherto veiled by a catch-word, a dryasdust scheme, and a set of personal "ideals." I see, in place of that empty figment of *one* linear history which can only be kept up by shutting one's eyes to the overwhelming multitude of the facts, the drama of *a number* of mighty Cultures, each springing with primitive strength from the soil of a mother-region to which it remains firmly bound throughout its whole life-cycle; each stamping its material, its mankind, in its own image; each having its own idea, its own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death. Here indeed are colors, lights, movements, that no intellectual eye has yet discovered. Here the Cultures, people, languages, truths, gods, landscapes bloom and age as the oaks and the stonepines, the blossoms, twigs and leaves—but there is no ageing "Mankind." Each Culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return. There is not *one* sculpture, *one* painting, *one* mathematics, *one* physics, but many, each in its deepest essence different from the others, each limited in duration and self-contained, just as each species of plant has its peculiar blossoms or fruit, its special type of growth and decline. These cultures, sublimated life-essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field. They belong, like the plants and the animals, to the living Nature of Goethe, and not to the dead Nature of Newton. I see world-history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvelous waxing and waning of organic forms. The professional historian, on the contrary, sees it as a sort of tapeworm industriously adding on to itself one epoch after another. . . .

*Europe Not a Center of Gravity.* Today we think in continents, and it is only our philosophers and historians who have not realized that we do so. Of what significance to us, then, are conceptions and purviews that they put before us as universally valid, when in truth their furthest horizon does not extend beyond the intellectual atmosphere of Western Man?

Examine, from this point of view, our best books. When Plato speaks of humanity, he means the Hellenes in contrast to the barbarians, which is entirely consonant with the ahistoric mode of the Classical life and thought, and his premises take him to conclusions that for *Greeks* were complete and

1. "Mankind? It is an abstraction. There are, always have been, and always will be, men and only men." (Goethe to Luden.)

significat. When, however, Kant philosophises, say on ethical ideas, he maintains the validity of his theses for men of all times and places. He does not say this in so many words, for, for himself and his readers, it is something that goes without saying. In his esthetics he formulates the principles, not of Phidias' art, or Rembrandt's art, but of Art generally. But what he poses as necessary forms of thought are in reality only necessary forms of Western thought, though a glance at Aristotle and his essentially different conclusions should have sufficed to show that Aristotle's intellect, not less penetrating than his own, was of different structure from it. The categories of the Westerner are just as alien to Russian thought as those of the Chinaman or the ancient Greek are to him. For us, the effective and complete comprehension of Classical root-words is just as impossible as that of Russian and Indian, and for the modern Chinese or Arab, with their utterly different intellectual constitutions, "philosophy from Bacon to Kant" has only a curiosity-value.

It is *this* that is lacking to the Western thinker, the very thinker in whom we might have expected to find it—insight into the *historically relative* character of his data, which are expressions of *one specific existence and one only*; knowledge of the necessary limits of their validity; the conviction that his "unshakable" truths and "eternal" views are simply true for him and eternal for his world-view; the duty of looking beyond them to find out what the men of other Cultures have with equal certainty evolved out of themselves. That and nothing else will impart completeness to the philosophy of the future, and only through an understanding of the living world shall we understand the symbolism of history. Here there is nothing constant, nothing universal. We must cease to speak of the forms of "Thought," the principles of "Tragedy," the mission of "The State." Universal validity involves always the fallacy of arguing from particular to particular.

But something much more disquieting than a logical fallacy begins to appear when the center of gravity of philosophy shifts from the abstract-systematic to the practical-ethical and our Western thinkers from Schopenhauer onward turn from the problem of cognition to the problem of life (the will to life, to power, to action). Here it is not the ideal abstract "man" of Kant that is subjected to examination, but actual man as he has inhabited the earth during historical time, grouped, whether primitive or advanced, by peoples; and it is more than ever futile to define the structure of his highest ideas in terms of the "ancient-medieval-modern" scheme with its local limitations. But it is done, nevertheless.

Consider the historical horizon of Nietzsche. His conceptions of decadence, militarism, the transvaluation of all values, the will to power, lie deep in the essence of Western civilization and are for the analysis of that civilization of decisive importance. But what, do we find, was the foundation on which he built up his creation? Romans and Greeks, Renaissance and European present, with a fleeting and uncomprehending side-glance at Indian philosophy—in short "ancient, medieval and modern" history. Strictly speaking, he never once moved outside the scheme, nor did any other thinker of his time.

What correlation, then, is there or can there be of his idea of the

"Dionysian" with the inner life of a highly civilized Chinese or an up-to-date American? What is the significance of his type of the "Superman"—for the world of Islam? Can image-forming antitheses of Nature and Intellect, Heathen and Christian, Classical and Modern, have any meaning for the soul of the Indian or the Russian? What can Tolstoi—who from the depths of his humanity rejected the whole Western world-idea as something alien and distant—do with the "Middle Ages," with Dante, with Luther? What can a Japanese do with Parzeval and "Zarathustra," or an Indian with Sophocles? And is the thought-range of Schopenhauer, Comte, Feuerbach, Hebbel or Strindberg any wider? Is not their whole psychology, for all its intention of world-wide validity, one of purely West-European significance?

How comic seem Ibsen's woman-problems—which also challenge the attention of all "humanity"—when, for his famous Nora, the lady of the North-west European city with the horizon that is implied by a house-rent of L100 to L300 a year and a Protestant upbringing, we substitute Caesar's wife, Madame de Sévigné, a Japanese or a Turkish peasant woman! But, for that matter, Ibsen's own circle of vision is that of the middle class in a great city of yesterday and today. His conflicts, which start from spiritual premises that did not exist till about 1850 and can scarcely last beyond 1950, are neither those of the great world nor those of the lower masses, still less those of the cities inhabited by non-European populations.

All these are local and temporary values—most of them indeed limited to the momentary "intelligentsia" of cities of West-European type. World-historical or "eternal" values they emphatically are not. Whatever the substantial importance of Ibsen's and Nietzsche's generation may be, it infringes the very meaning of the word "world-history"—which denotes the totality and not a selected part—to subordinate, to undervalue, or to ignore the factors which lie outside "modern" interests. Yet in fact they are so undervalued or ignored to an amazing extent. What the West has said and thought, hitherto, on the problems of space, time, motion, number, will, marriage, property, tragedy, science, has remained narrow and dubious, because men were always looking for *the* solution of *the* question. It was never seen that many questioners implies many answers, that any philosophical question is really a veiled desire to get an explicit affirmation of what is implicit in the question itself, that the great questions of any period are fluid beyond all conception, and that therefore it is only by obtaining a *group of historically limited solutions* and measuring it by *utterly impersonal* criteria that the final secrets can be reached. The real student of mankind treats no standpoint as absolutely right or absolutely wrong. In the face of such grave problems as that of Time or that of Marriage, it is insufficient to appeal to personal experience, or an inner voice, or reason, or the opinion of ancestors or contemporaries. These may say what is true for the questioner himself and for his time, but that is not all. In other Cultures the phenomenon talks a different language, for other men there are different truths. The *thinker* must admit the validity of all, or of none.

How greatly, then, Western world-criticism can be widened and deepened! How immensely far beyond the innocent relativism of Nietzsche and

his generation one must look—how fine one's sense for form and one's psychological insight must become—how completely one must free oneself from limitations of self, of practical interests, of horizon—before one dare assert the pretension to understand world-history, the *world-as-history*.

*The "Copernican" Picture of World-History.* In opposition to all these arbitrary and narrow schemes, derived from tradition or personal choice, into which history is forced, I put forward the natural, the "Copernican," form of the historical process which lies deep in the essence of that process and reveals itself only to an eye perfectly free from prepossessions.

Such an eye was Goethe's. That which Goethe called *Living Nature* is exactly that which we are calling here world-history, *world-as-history*. Goethe, who as artist portrayed the life and development, always the life and development, of his figures, the thing-becoming and not the thing-become ("Wilhelm Meister" and "Wahrheit und Dichtung") hated Mathematics. For him, the world-as-mechanism stood opposed to the world-as-organism, dead nature to living nature, law to form. As naturalist, every line he wrote was meant to display the image of a thing-becoming, the "impressed form" living and developing. Sympathy, observation, comparison, immediate and inward certainty, intellectual *flair*—these were the means whereby he was enabled to approach the secrets of the phenomenal world in motion. *Now these are the means of historical research*—precisely these and no others. It was this godlike insight that prompted him to say at the bivouac fire on the evening of the Battle of Valmy: "Here and now begins a new epoch of world history, and you, gentlemen, can say that you 'were there'." No general, no diplomat, let alone the philosophers, ever so directly felt history "becoming." It is the deepest judgment that any man ever uttered about a great historical act in the moment of its accomplishment.

And just as he followed out the development of the plant-form from the leaf, the birth of the vertebrate type, the process of the geological strata—the *Destiny in nature and not the Causality*—so here we shall develop the form-language of human history, its periodic structure, its organic logic out of the profusion of all the challenging details.

In other aspects, mankind is habitually, and rightly, reckoned as one of the organisms of the earth's surface. Its physical structure, its natural functions, the whole phenomenal conception of it, all belong to a more comprehensive unity. Only in *this* aspect is it treated otherwise, despite that deeply-felt relationship of plant destiny and human destiny which is an eternal theme of all lyrical poetry, and despite that similarity of human history to that of any other of the higher life-groups which is the refrain of endless beast-legends, sagas and fables.

But only bring analogy to bear on this aspect as on the rest, letting the world of human Cultures intimately and unreservedly work upon the imagination instead of forcing it into a ready-made scheme. Let the words youth, growth, maturity, decay—hitherto, and today more than ever, used to express subjective valuations and entirely personal preferences in sociology, ethics and esthetics—be taken at last as objective descriptions of organic states. Set forth the Classical Culture as a self-contained phenomenon em-

bodying and expressing the Classical soul, put it beside the Egyptian, the Indian, the Babylonian, the Chinese and the Western, and determine for each of these higher individuals what is typical in their surgings and what is necessary in the riot of incident. And then at last will unfold itself the picture of world-history that is natural to us, men of the West, and to us alone. . . .

*Intuitive Vision and History.* *Nature* and *History* are the opposite extreme terms of man's range of possibilities, whereby he is enabled to order the actualities about him as a picture of the world. An actuality is *Nature* in so far as it assigns things-becoming their place as things-become, and *History* in so far as it orders things-become with reference to their becoming. An actuality as an evocation of mind is contemplated, and as an assurance of the senses is critically comprehended, the first being exemplified in the worlds of Plato, Rembrandt, Goethe and Beethoven, the second in the worlds of Parmenides, Descartes, Kant and Newton. Cognition in the strict sense of the word is that act of experience of which the completed issue is called "*Nature*." The cognized and "*Nature*" are one and the same. The symbol of mathematical number has shown us that the aggregate of things cognized is the same as the world of things mechanically defined, things correct once and for all, things brought under law. *Nature is the sum of the law-imposed necessities.* There are only laws of *Nature*. No physicist who understands his duty would wish to transcend these limits. His task is to establish an ordered code which not only includes all the laws that he can find in the picture of *Nature* that is proper to himself but, further, represents that picture exhaustively and without remainder.

Contemplation of vision (*Anschauung*), on the other hand—I may recall Goethe's words: "vision is to be carefully distinguished from seeing"—, is that act of experience which is *itself history because it is itself a fulfilling*. That which has been lived is that which has happened, and is history. . . .

Becoming has no number. We can count, measure, dissect only the lifeless and so much of the living as can be dissociated from livingness. Pure becoming, pure life, is in this sense incapable of being bounded. It lies beyond the domain of cause and effect, law and measure. No deep and pure historical research seeks for conformities with causal laws—or, if it does so, it does not understand its own essence. . . .

We must not lose sight of the fact that at bottom the wish to write history *scientifically* involves a contradiction. True science reaches just as far as the notions of truth and falsity have validity: this applies to mathematics and it applies also to the science of historical spade-work, viz., the collection, ordering and sifting of material. But real historical vision (which only *begins* at this point) belongs to the domain of significances, in which the crucial words are not "correct" and "erroneous," but "deep" and "shallow." The true physicist is not deep, but *keen*: it is only when he leaves the domain of working hypotheses and brushes against the final things that he can be deep, but at this stage he is already a metaphysician. *Nature* is to be handled scientifically. *History* poetically. . . .

On the other hand, within the very realm of numbers and exact knowledge there is that which Goethe called "living *Nature*," an immediate vision

of pure becoming and self-shaping, in fact, history as above defined. Goethe's world was, in the first instance, an organism, an existence, and it is easy therefore to see why his researches, even when superficially of a physical kind, do not make numbers, or laws, or causality captured in formulae, or dissection of any sort their object, but are morphology in the highest sense of the word; and why his work neither uses nor needs to use the specifically Western and un-Classical means of causal treatment, metrical experiment. His treatment of the Earth's crust is invariably geology, and never mineralogy, which he called the science of something dead.

Let it be said, once more, that there are no exact boundaries set between the two kinds of world-notion. However great the contrast between becoming and become, the fact remains that they are jointly present in every kind of understanding. He who looks at the becoming and fulfilling in them, experiences History; he who dissects them as become and fulfilled cognizes Nature. . . .

All modes of comprehending the world may, in the last analysis, be described as Morphology. *The Morphology of the mechanical and the extended, a science which discovers and orders nature-laws and causal relations, is called Systematic. The Morphology of the organic, of history and life and all that bears the sign of direction and destiny, is called Physiognomic. . . .*

Descriptive, creative, Physiognomic is the art of portraiture transferred to the spiritual domain. Don Quixote, Werther, Julian Sorel, are portraits of an epoch, Faust the portrait of a whole Culture. For the nature-researcher, the morphologist as systematist, the portrayal of the world is only a business of imitation, and corresponds to the "fidelity to nature" and the "likeness" of the craftsman-painter, who, at bottom, works on purely mathematical lines. But a real portrait in the Rembrandt sense of the word is physiognomic, that is, *history* captured in a moment. The set of his self-portraits is nothing else but a (truly Goethian) autobiography. So should the biographies of the great Cultures be handled. The "fidelity" part, the work of the professional historian on facts and figures, is only a means, not an end. The countenance of history is made up of all those things which hitherto we have only managed to evaluate according to personal standards, i.e., as beneficial or harmful, good or bad, satisfactory or unsatisfactory—political forms and economic forms, battles and arts, science and gods, mathematics and morals. Everything whatsoever that has *become* is a symbol, and the expression of a soul. Only to one having the knowledge of men will it unveil itself. The restraint of a law it abhors. What it demands is that its significance should be sensed. And thus research adds up to a final or superlative truth—Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis.<sup>2</sup>

The nature-researcher can be educated, but the man who knows history is born. He seizes and pierces men and facts with one blow, guided by a feeling which cannot be acquired by learning or affected by persuasion,

2. "All we see before us passing  
Sign and symbol is alone."  
(from the final stanza of *Faust*, Part II).



but which only too rarely manifests itself in full intensity. Direction, fixing, ordering, defining, by cause and effect, are things that one can do if one likes. These things are work, but the other is creation. Form and law, portrayal and comprehension, symbol and formula, have different organs, and their opposition is that in which life stands to death, production to destruction. Reason, system and comprehension kill as they "cognize." That which is cognized becomes a rigid object, capable of measurement and subdivision. Intuitive vision, on the other hand, vivifies and incorporates the details in a living inwardly-felt unity. Poetry and historical study are kin.

## TOYNBEE (1889- )

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ARNOLD JOSEPH TOYNBEE was born in 1889. Educated at Balliol College, Oxford, he was a Fellow and Tutor of Balliol from 1912 until 1915. He was a member of the Middle Eastern section of the British delegation to the peace conference in 1919; and from 1919 to 1924 Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek Language, Literature, and History at London University. From 1925 until his retirement thirty years later he was Director of Studies in the Royal Institute of International Affairs and Research Professor of International History at London. The author of a number of books on international politics and Greek history, his principal work has been his *A Study of History* (Vols. I-III in 1934, Vols. IV-VI in 1939, Vols. VII-X in 1954).

*A Study of History* is the product of a learning and erudition which make previous attempts to present a systematic picture of human history look rather thin and sketchy; it has been inspired by a vision of imaginative power and range; and the author exhibits throughout a considerable capacity for synthesizing historical material, for tracing unsuspected patterns, and for inventing fresh frameworks of classification and interpretation. Yet, in spite of this, Toynbee's work has been the object of very severe criticism, particularly concerning the method which he has employed.

Toynbee's method, initially at any rate, appeared to be an inductive one. His basic unit is the "civilization" (compare Spengler's "cultures") and he claims to have discovered twenty-one such civilizations which have existed at various times during the course of human history. A comparative examination of these shows, he thinks, that they have passed through similar stages of growth, breakdown, and eventual dissolution, the final phase of each one being marked by the formation of a "universal state." Thus, in the history of what Toynbee calls the "Hellenic" civilization there was a "time of troubles" which was succeeded in due course by the unitary political struc-

ture of the Roman Empire; and parallels to such a development are, Toynbee claims, to be found in the other civilizations he mentions. These parallels are discussed and elaborated in great detail; certain historical "laws"—the "law," for example, of "challenge-and-response"—are formulated to account for the emergence of crucial phases in a civilization's career; and Toynbee draws conclusions concerning the future open to contemporary "Western" civilization, which has not yet, he seems to think, passed irrevocably into the period of decline and dissolution.

The criticisms brought against Toynbee's procedure from a methodological standpoint have been of various kinds; two may briefly be mentioned here. First, it has been argued that Toynbee's method of identifying the civilizations which form the subject matter of his inquiry is not independent of the parallels he subsequently finds between their subsequent careers. Thus, some of the divisions he makes between temporarily adjoining civilizations seem to be determined by considerations of what course a civilization *must* pursue if it is properly to be called a "civilization." And, insofar as he does this, the conclusions at which he arrives concerning the similar paths followed by different societies do not represent important factual findings based upon empirical observations at all; they merely reflect the method of classification initially employed. Secondly, it has been pointed out that, in his later volumes at least, Toynbee seems at times to imply that societies are the agents or instruments of purposes lying outside them: Toynbee asks, for example, whether "universal states" are "ends in themselves or means towards something beyond them." But the raising of questions like this one implies a radical shift of ground; they cannot be answered solely by an appeal to the evidence supplied by historical research and investigation, and yet it was upon such an appeal that Toynbee initially seemed to be relying in his work.

The following extracts are illustrative of some of the dominating features of Toynbee's thought about history: in particular, his employment of unifying concepts and generalizations, and his concern with the fate of Western civilization.

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## 1. The Disintegration of Civilizations\*

In the last chapter we sought, and found, a parallel—which involved also an inevitable contrast—between the roles of creative personalities in growing and in disintegrating societies. We are now to pursue a similar line of inves-

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\*This selection is from Chapter XXI of D. C. Somervell's abridgement of Vols. I-VI of *A Study of History*, copyright by Oxford University Press, with whose permission it is here reprinted.

tigation in a different part of our subject and to look for a parallel—which will presumably again involve a contrast—between what may be called the rhythm of growth and the rhythm of disintegration. The underlying formula in each case is one with which we are already very familiar, since it has accompanied us all through this Study; it is the formula of challenge-and-response. In a growing civilization a challenge meets with a successful response which proceeds to generate another and a different challenge which meets with another successful response. There is no term to this process of growth unless and until a challenge arises which the civilization in question fails to meet—a tragic event which means a cessation of growth and what we have called a breakdown. Here the correlative rhythm begins. The challenge has not been met, but it none the less continues to present itself. A second convulsive effort is made to meet it, and, if this succeeds, growth will of course be resumed. But we will assume that, after a partial and temporary success, this response likewise fails. There will then be a further relapse, and perhaps, after an interval, a further attempt at a response which will in time achieve a temporary and partial success in meeting what is still the same inexorable challenge. This again will be followed by a further failure, which may or may not prove final and involve the dissolution of the society. In military language the rhythm may be expressed as rout-rally-rout-rally-rout. . . .

If we revert to the technical terms which we devised early in this Study and have so constantly used, it is at once apparent that the time of troubles following a breakdown is a rout; the establishment of the universal state, a rally; and the interregnum which follows the break-up of the universal state, the final rout. But we have already noticed in the history of one universal state, the Hellenic, a relapse into anarchy following the death of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180 and a recovery under Diocletian. There might prove to be more than one relapse and recovery in the history of any particular universal state. Indeed the number of such relapses and recoveries might be found to depend on the power of the lens that we applied to the object under examination. There was, for instance, a brief, but startling, relapse in A.D. 69, the "year of four emperors," but we are concerned here with salient features only. There might also be a period of partial recovery in the middle of the time of troubles. If we allow for one signal recovery during the time of troubles and one signal relapse during the lifetime of the universal state, that will give us the formula: rout-rally-rout-rally-rout-rally-rout, which we may describe as three-and-a-half "beats" of our rout-rally rhythm. There is, of course, no special virtue in the number three-and-a-half. A particular instance of disintegration might show two-and-a-half, or four-and-a-half, or five-and-a-half without failing to conform in essentials to the general rhythm of the disintegration process. Actually, however, three-and-a-half beats seems to be the pattern which fits the histories of a number of disintegrating societies, and we will pass a few of them in rapid review by way of illustration.

[At this stage Toynbee cites cases of breakdown as they have occurred in various societies: the "Hellenic," the "Sinic," the "Sumeric,"

the "Orthodox Christian," the "Hindu," are considered in turn. He then goes on:]

We might subject the disintegration of our other civilizations to a similar analysis in all cases where we possess sufficient evidence to make such examination remunerative. In some cases we should find that the full quota of "beats" is lacking simply because the civilization in question was swallowed alive by one of its neighbors before it had worked its passage to the haven of natural death. We have, however, already adduced enough evidence of the rhythm of disintegration to apply this rhythm-pattern to the history of our own Western Civilization in order to see if it throws any light upon a question which we have several times asked and never yet professed to answer: the question whether our own civilization has suffered a breakdown, and, if so, what stage it has now reached in its disintegration.

One fact is plain: we have not yet experienced the establishment of a universal state, in spite of two desperate efforts by the Germans to impose one upon us in the first half of the present century and an equally desperate attempt by Napoleonic France a hundred years earlier. Another fact is equally plain: there is among us a profound and heartfelt aspiration for the establishment, not of a universal state, but of some form of world order, akin perhaps to the Homonoia or Concord preached in vain by certain Hellenic statesmen and philosophers during the Hellenic time of troubles, which will secure the blessings of a universal state without its deadly curse. The curse of a universal state is that it is the result of a successful knock-out blow delivered by one sole surviving member of a group of contending military Powers. It is a product of that "salvation by the sword" which we have seen to be no salvation at all. What we are looking for is a free consent of free peoples to dwell together in unity, and to make, uncoerced, the far-reaching adjustments and concessions without which this ideal cannot be realized in practice. There is no need to enlarge upon this theme, which is the commonplace of thousands of contemporary disquisitions. The astonishing prestige enjoyed by the American President Wilson in Europe—though not in his own country—during the few short months preceding and following the armistice of November 1918 was a measure of the aspirations of our world. President Wilson was addressed for the most part in prose; the best-known surviving testimonials to Augustus are in the verses of Virgil and Horace. But, prose or verse, the spirit animating these two outpourings of faith, hope and thanksgiving was manifestly the same. The outcome, however, was different. Augustus succeeded in providing his world with a universal state; Wilson failed to provide his with something better.

That low man goes on adding one to one;  
His hundred's soon hit.  
This high man, aiming at a million,  
Misses a unit.<sup>1</sup>

These considerations and comparisons suggest that we are already far advanced in our time of troubles; and, if we ask what has been our most

1. Browning, R.: *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

conspicuous and specific trouble in the recent past, the answer clearly is: nationalistic internecine warfare, reinforced, as has been pointed out in an earlier part of this Study, by the combined "drive" of energies generated by the recently released forces of Democracy and Industrialism. We may date the incidence of this scourge from the outbreak of the French Revolutionary wars at the end of the eighteenth century. But, when we examined this subject before, we were confronted by the fact that, in the modern chapter of our Western history, this bout of violent warfare was not the first but the second of its kind. The earlier bout is represented by the so-called Wars of Religion which devastated Western Christendom from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, and we found that between these two bouts of violent warfare there intervenes a century in which warfare was a comparatively mild disease, a "sport of kings," not exacerbated by fanaticism in either the religious sectarian or the democratic national vein. Thus, in our own history too, we find what we have come to recognize as the typical pattern of a time of troubles: a breakdown, a rally and a second relapse.

We can discern why the eighteenth-century rally in the course of our time of troubles was abortive and ephemeral; it was because the toleration achieved by "the Enlightenment" was a toleration based not on the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity but on the Mephistophelian maladies of disillusionment, apprehension and cynicism. It was not an arduous achievement of religious fervor but a facile by-product of its abatement.

Can we at all foresee the outcome of the second and still more violent bout of warfare into which our Western World has fallen in consequence of the spiritual inadequacy of its eighteenth-century Enlightenment? If we are to try to look into our future, we may begin by reminding ourselves that, though all the other civilizations whose history is known to us may be either dead or dying, a civilization is not like an animal organism, condemned by an inexorable destiny to die after traversing a predetermined life-course. Even if all other civilizations that have come into existence so far were to prove in fact to have followed this path, there is no known law of historical determinism that compels us to leap out of the intolerable frying-pan of our time of troubles into the slow and steady fire of a universal state where we shall in due course be reduced to dust and ashes. At the same time, such precedents from the histories of other civilizations and from the life-course of nature are bound to appear formidable in the sinister light of our present situation. This chapter itself was written on the eve of the outbreak of the General War of 1939-45 for readers who had already lived through the General War of 1914-18, and it was recast for republication on the morrow of the ending of the second of these two world wars within one lifetime by the invention and employment of a bomb in which a newly contrived release of atomic energy has been directed by man to the destruction of human life and works on an unprecedented scale. This swift succession of catastrophic events on a steeply mounting gradient inevitably inspires a dark doubt about our future, and this doubt threatens to undermine our faith and hope at a critical eleventh hour which calls for

the utmost exertion of these saving spiritual faculties. Here is a challenge which we cannot evade, and our destiny depends on our response.

I dreamed, and behold I saw a man cloathed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book and read therein; and as he read he wept and trembled; and, not being able longer to contain, he broke out with a lamentable cry saying "What shall I do?"

It was not without cause that Bunyan's "Christian" was so greatly distressed.

I am for certain informed (said he) that this our city will be burned with fire from Heaven—in which fearful overthrow both myself with thec my wife and you my sweet babes shall miserably come to ruine, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered.

What response to this challenge is Christian going to make? Is he going to look this way and that as if he would run, yet stand still because he cannot tell which way to go? Or will he begin to run—and run on crying "Life! Life! Eternal Life!"—with his eye set on a shining light and his feet bound for a distant wicket-gate? If the answer to this question depended on nobody but Christian himself, our knowledge of the uniformity of human nature might incline us to predict that Christian's imminent destiny was Death in his City of Destruction. But in the classic version of the myth we are told that the human protagonist was not left entirely to his own resources in the decisive hour. According to John Bunyan, Christian was saved by his encounter with Evangelist. And, inasmuch as it cannot be supposed that God's nature is less constant than Man's, we may and must pray that a reprieve which God has granted to our society once will not be refused if we ask for it again in a humble spirit and with a contrite heart.

## 2. My View of History\*

... The general war of 1914 overtook me expounding Thucydides to Balliol undergraduates reading for *Literae Humaniores*, and then suddenly my understanding was illuminated. The experience that we were having in our world now had been experienced by Thucydides in his world already.

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\*This extract is taken from Chapter I of Toynbee's *Civilization on Trial*, copyright by Oxford University Press. It is here reprinted with the kind permission of the publishers.

I was re-reading him now with a new perception—perceiving meanings in his words, and feelings behind his phrases, to which I had been insensible until I, in my turn, had run into that historical crisis that had inspired him to write his work. Thucydides, it now appeared, had been over this ground before. He and his generation had been ahead of me and mine in the stage of historical experience that we had respectively reached; in fact, his present had been my future. But this made nonsense of the chronological notation which registered my world as 'modern' and Thucydides' world as 'ancient.' Whatever chronology might say, Thucydides' world and my world had now proved to be philosophically contemporary. And, if this were the true relation between the Graeco-Roman and the Western civilizations, might not the relation between all the civilizations known to us turn out to be the same?

This vision—new to me—of the philosophical contemporaneity of all civilizations was fortified by being seen against a background provided by some of the discoveries of our modern Western physical science. On the time-scale now unfolded by geology and cosmogony, the five or six thousand years that had elapsed since the first emergence of representatives of the species of human society that we label 'civilizations' were an infinitesimally brief span of time compared to the age, up to date, of the human race, of life on this planet, of the planet itself, of our own solar system, of the galaxy in which it is one grain of dust, or of the immensely vaster and older sum total of the stellar cosmos. By comparison with these orders of temporal magnitude, civilizations that had emerged in the second millennium B.C. (like the Graeco-Roman), in the fourth millennium B.C. (like the Ancient Egyptian), and in the first millennium of the Christian era (like our own) were one another's contemporaries indeed.

Thus history, in the sense of the histories of the human societies called civilizations, revealed itself as a sheaf of parallel, contemporary, and recent essays in a new enterprise: a score of attempts, up to date, to transcend the level of primitive human life at which man, after having become himself, had apparently lain torpid for some hundreds of thousands of years—and was still, in our day, so lying in out-of-the-way places like New Guinea, Tierra del Fuego and the north-eastern extremity of Siberia, where such primitive human communities had not yet been pounced upon and either exterminated or assimilated by the aggressive pioneers of other human societies that, unlike these sluggards, had now, though this only recently, got on the move again. The amazing present difference in cultural level between various extant societies was brought to my attention by the works of Professor Teggart of the University of California. This far-going differentiation had all happened within these brief last five or six thousand years. Here was a promising point to probe in investigating, *sub specie temporis*, the mystery of the universe.

What was it that, after so long a pause, had so recently set in such vigorous motion once again, towards some new and still unknown social and spiritual destination, those few societies that had embarked upon the enterprise called civilization? What had roused them from a torpor that

the great majority of human societies had never shaken off? This question was simmering in my mind when, in the summer of 1920, Professor Namier—who had already put Eastern Europe on my map for me—placed in my hands Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*. As I read those pages teeming with firefly flashes of historical insight, I wondered at first whether my whole inquiry had been disposed of by Spengler before even the questions, not to speak of the answers, had fully taken shape in my own mind. One of my own cardinal points was that the smallest intelligible fields of historical study were whole societies and not arbitrarily insulated fragments of them like the nation-states of the modern West or the city-states of the Graeco-Roman world. Another of my points was that the histories of all societies of the species called civilizations were in some sense parallel and contemporary; and both these points were also cardinal in Spengler's system. But when I looked in Spengler's book for an answer to my question about the genesis of civilizations, I saw that there was still work for me to do, for on this point Spengler was, it seemed to me, most unilluminatingly dogmatic and deterministic. According to him, civilizations arose, developed, declined, and foundered in unvarying conformity with a fixed time-table, and no explanation was offered for any of this. It was just a law of nature which Spengler had detected, and you must take it on trust from the master: *ipse dixit*. This arbitrary fiat seemed disappointingly unworthy of Spengler's brilliant genius; and here I became aware of a difference in national traditions. Where the German *a priori* method drew blank, let us see what could be done by English empiricism. Let us test alternative possible explanations in the light of the facts and see how they stood the ordeal.

Race and environment were the two main rival keys that were offered by would-be scientific nineteenth-century Western historians for solving the problem of the cultural inequality of various extant human societies, and neither key proved, on trial, to unlock the fast-closed door. To take the race theory first, what evidence was there that the differences in physical race between different members of the genus *homo* were correlated with differences on the spiritual plane which was the field of history? And, if the existence of this correlation were to be assumed for the sake of argument, how was it that members of almost all the races were to be found among the fathers of one or more of the civilizations? The black race alone had made no appreciable contribution up to date; but, considering the shortness of the time during which the experiment of civilization had been on foot so far, this was no cogent evidence of incapacity; it might merely be the consequence of a lack of opportunity or a lack of stimulus. As for environment, there was, of course, a manifest similarity between the physical conditions in the lower Nile valley and in the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley, which had been the respective cradles of the Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations; but, if these physical conditions were really the cause of their emergence, why had no parallel civilizations emerged in the physically comparable valleys of the Jordan and the Rio Grande? And why had the civilization of the equatorial Andean plateau had no African counterpart



in the highlands of Kenya? The breakdown of these would-be scientific impersonal explanations drove me to turn to mythology. I took this turning rather self-consciously and shamefacedly, as though it were a provocatively retrograde step. I might have been less diffident if I had not been ignorant, as I was at that date, of the new ground broken by psychology during the war of 1914-18. If I had been acquainted at the time with the works of C. G. Jung, they would have given me the clue. I actually found it in Goethe's *Faust*, in which I had fortunately been grounded at school as thoroughly as in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Goethe's 'Prologue in Heaven' opens with the archangels hymning the perfection of God's creation. But, just because His works are perfect, the Creator has left Himself no scope for any further exercise of His creative powers, and there might have been no way out of this *impasse* if Mephistopheles—created for this very purpose—had not presented himself before the throne and challenged God to give him a free hand to spoil, if he can, one of the Creator's choicest works. God accepts the challenge and thereby wins an opportunity to carry His work of creation forward. An encounter between two personalities in the form of challenge and response: have we not here the flint and steel by whose mutual impact the creative spark is kindled?

In Goethe's exposition of the plot of the *Divina Commedia*, Mephistopheles is created to be diddled—as the fiend, to his disgust, discovers too late. Yet if, in response to the Devil's challenge, God genuinely puts His created works in jeopardy, as we must assume that He does, in order to win an opportunity of creating something new, we are also bound to assume that the Devil does not always lose. And thus, if the working of challenge-and-response explains the otherwise inexplicable and unpredictable genesis and growths of civilizations, it also explains their breakdowns and disintegrations. A majority of the score of civilizations known to us appear to have broken down already, and a majority of this majority have trodden to the end the downward path that terminates in dissolution.

Our *post mortem* examination of dead civilizations does not enable us to cast the horoscope of our own civilization or of any other that is still alive. *Pace* Spengler, there seems to be no reason why a succession of stimulating challenges should not be met by a succession of victorious responses *ad infinitum*. On the other hand, when we make an empirical comparative study of the paths which the dead civilizations have respectively travelled from breakdown to dissolution, we do here seem to find a certain measure of Spenglerian uniformity, and this, after all, is not surprising. Since breakdown means loss of control, this in turn means the lapse of freedom into automatism, and, whereas free acts are infinitely variable and utterly unpredictable, automatic processes are apt to be uniform and regular.

Briefly stated, the regular pattern of social disintegration is a schism of the disintegrating society into a recalcitrant proletariat and a less and less effectively dominant minority. The process of disintegration does not proceed evenly; it jolts along in alternating spasms of rout, rally, and rout. In the last rally but one, the dominant minority succeeds in temporarily

arresting the society's lethal self-laceration by imposing on it the peace of a universal state. Within the framework of the dominant minority's universal state the proletariat creates a universal church, and after the next rout, in which the disintegrating civilization finally dissolves, the universal church may live on to become the chrysalis from which a new civilization eventually emerges. To modern Western students of history, these phenomena are most familiar in the Graeco-Roman examples of the *Pax Romana* and the Christian Church. The establishment of the *Pax Romana* by Augustus seemed, at the time, to have put the Graeco-Roman world back upon firm foundations after it had been battered for several centuries by perpetual war, mis-government, and revolution. But the Augustan rally proved, after all, to be no more than a respite. After two hundred and fifty years of comparative tranquillity, the Empire suffered in the third century of the Christian era a collapse from which it never fully recovered, and at the next crisis, in the fifth and sixth centuries, it went to pieces irretrievably. The true beneficiary of the temporary Roman Peace was the Christian Church. The Church seized this opportunity to strike root and spread; it was stimulated by persecution until the Empire, having failed to crush it, decided, instead, to take it into partnership. And, when even this reinforcement failed to save the Empire from destruction, the Church took over the Empire's heritage. The same relation between a declining civilization and a rising religion can be observed in a dozen other cases. In the Far East, for instance, the Ts'in and Han Empire plays the Roman Empire's part, while the rôle of the Christian Church is assumed by the Mahayana school of Buddhism.

If the death of one civilization thus brings on the birth of another, does not the at first sight hopeful and exciting quest for the goal of human endeavours resolve itself, after all, into a dreary round of vain repetitions of the Gentiles? This cyclic view of the process of history was taken so entirely for granted by even the greatest Greek and Indian souls and intellects—by Aristotle, for instance, and by the Buddha—that they simply assumed that it was true without thinking it necessary to prove it. On the other hand, Captain Marryat, in ascribing the same view to the ship's carpenter of HMS *Rattlesnake*, assumes with equal assurance that this cyclic theory is an extravaganza, and he makes the amiable exponent of it a figure of fun. To our Western minds the cyclic view of history, if taken seriously, would reduce history to a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. But mere repugnance does not in itself account for effortless unbelief. The traditional Christian beliefs in hell fire and in the last trump were also repugnant, yet they continued to be believed for generations. For our fortunate Western imperviousness to the Greek and Indian belief in cycles we are indebted to the Jewish and Zoroastrian contributions to our *Weltanschauung*.

In the vision seen by the Prophets of Israel, Judah, and Iran, history is not a cyclic and not a mechanical process. It is the masterful and progressive execution, on the narrow stage of this world, of a divine plan which is revealed to us in this fragmentary glimpse, but which transcends our human powers of vision and understanding in every dimension. Moreover, the Prophets, through their own experience, anticipated Aeschylus' discovery

that learning comes through suffering—a discovery which we, in our time and circumstances, have been making too.

Shall we opt, then, for the Jewish-Zoroastrian view of history as against the Graeco-Indian? So drastic a choice may not, after all, be forced upon us, for it may be that the two views are not fundamentally irreconcilable. After all, if a vehicle is to move forward on a course which its driver has set, it must be borne along on wheels that turn monotonously round and round. While civilizations rise and fall and, in falling, give rise to others, some purposeful enterprise, higher than theirs, may all the time be making headway, and, in a divine plan, the learning that comes through the suffering caused by the failures of civilizations may be the sovereign means of progress. Abraham was an émigré from a civilization in *extremis*; the Prophets were children of another civilization in disintegration; Christianity was born of the sufferings of a disintegrating Graeco-Roman world. Will some comparable spiritual enlightenment be kindled in the 'displaced persons' who are the counterparts, in our world, of those Jewish exiles to whom so much was revealed in their painful exile by the waters of Babylon? The answer to this question, whatever the answer may be, is of greater moment than the still inscrutable destiny of our world-enccompassing Western civilization.

# The Nature of Historical Knowledge

## DILTHEY (1833-1911)

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WILHELM DILTHEY was born in Biebrich am Rhein in 1833. He intended to study for the ministry, but, influenced by Leopold Ranke and other members of the history faculty of the University of Berlin, he turned instead to philosophy and history. He became Professor of Philosophy at Basle in 1867, moved to Kiel the following year, and to Breslau in 1871. In 1882 he returned to Berlin to take over the chair of philosophy previously held by Lotze, and remained there until his death in 1911.

His major published works, none of which have been translated into English, include: "The Life of Schleiermacher" (*Das Leben Schleiermachers*), 1867-70, "Introduction to the Human Studies" (*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*), 1883, "Ideas Concerning Descriptive and Analytic Psychology" (*Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie*), 1894, and "The Construction of the Historical World in the Human Studies" (*Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*), 1910.

The present essay was not published during Dilthey's lifetime. Though hardly a model of lucidity, it displays, as concisely as can be found in his writings, his preoccupation with the differences between the methodology of the natural sciences and the human studies, and with the problem of determining the nature of historical knowledge.

Dilthey's doctrine of the Understanding—the key to his beliefs about the nature of historical judgment—can be briefly summarized as follows: all physical expressions are expressions of mental events, or states, and the job of the Understanding (which is a faculty as well as a process) is to link up

any given expression with its appropriate mental event or state. There are three classes of expressions, arranged according to the ease with which they may be understood and the reliability of the information they afford about the mind ("life-structure" in Dilthey's terminology) which produces them. "Judgments"—comparable in some ways to analytic propositions—are capable of being completely understood, but reveal nothing. "Actions" reveal goals and intentions, but not misgivings, hesitations, or enthusiasms: like "expressions of experience" they are made comprehensible through the mediation of the "objective mind," this being a compendious term for language, social institutions, legal and philosophical systems, and all such public features of the world. Expressions of experience, when unpremeditated, wholly reveal the mind which makes them: some expressions are cries of pain or ecstasy, others take the form of novels, plays, or musical compositions. The first sort can be counterfeited, but aesthetic expressions of experience have a kind of logically guaranteed validity independent of the intentions of their authors.

Corresponding to these three classes of expressions (their derivation from current faculty psychology should not go unnoticed) are two kinds of Understanding: elementary understanding, which is directed at individual expressions, and the higher understanding, whose function it is to order the various items presented by the elementary understanding into a coherent structure. The elementary understanding seems able to function without any intermediary, but the higher forms must use some form of inference, either reasoning by analogy, or subsuming under a general type. There is one form of higher understanding, though, which dispenses with the uncertainty of induction, and which for that reason occupies a special place in Dilthey's schema—though it achieves its result by a kind of psychological mirror-trick. The ordinary processes of understanding run counter to the stream of events: we reason from effects to their probable causes, from actions to their motives. But under certain circumstances, and especially when what we are trying to understand is a work of literary or poetic genius, we can imaginatively re-create in our own minds the events or emotions in question in the order in which they occurred: this is not, as some commentators have supposed, a question of literally having other people's experiences, but rather of rearranging the structure of our own experience (Dilthey is a kind of psychological atomist) according to the model presented by the literary or historical work in question. Nor are there any independent criteria for judging the success of our efforts: if we are convinced, that is enough. Or almost enough. The last part of the essay is devoted to an attempt to establish some kind of criteria through hermeneutics; but what emerges seems to be (for all the cumbrous terminology) largely common sense.

The temptation to dismiss or to ignore Dilthey is, admittedly, great: he was a poor logician and an impossible stylist; but he was also a good practicing historian, and the difference between him and his historical colleagues was immense. They were content simply to practice their profession; but he took the trouble to try to describe very carefully what it

was, exactly, that historical thinking involved, and to estimate—in an interesting and original way—its value and significance.

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## The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Life-Expressions\*

Understanding and interpreting are the methods used in the human studies.<sup>1</sup> All functions are united through them. They contain all the truths of the human studies. At every stage the understanding reveals a world. The understanding of other persons and life-expressions<sup>2</sup> is built on our own experience and on our understanding of it, and on the continuous interplay of experience and understanding. But here we are concerned neither with logical construction nor psychological analysis, but rather with analysis from an epistemological viewpoint. We propose to determine the value of understanding others for historical knowledge.

1. *Life-Expressions*. The given are what I shall call life-expressions. They appear in the world of the senses as the expressions of a mind, and so make knowledge of mental events possible. By "life-expression" I understand not only those expressions which signify or mean something in particular; I specifically include those which, without so intending, make mental life comprehensible.

The kind of understanding and its result differ according to the class of life-expressions towards which it is directed.

The first class of life-expressions includes conceptions, judgments, larger ideas. Extracted from the experience in which they occur, they have, as constituent elements of knowledge, a common fundamental character in virtue of the similarity of their logical function which is quite independent of the manner in which they appear in the thought-complex.<sup>3</sup> A judgment asserts the validity of a thought-content, irrespective of the time, place, or origin of its occurrence. Precisely therein lies the meaning of the concept of identity. A judgment is the same for the person who makes it as for the person who understands it; it is, as it were, transferred unaltered

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\*This essay was originally published in Volume VII of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften* and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Stuttgart. It has been translated from the German by J. J. Kuehl, of St. Antony's College, Oxford University.

1. Geisteswissenschaften.
2. geistigen Lebensäußerungen.
3. Denkbzusammenhang.

from the one to the other. Understanding has this fundamental character when it is directed at any logically complete thought-complex, that it is concerned with the pure thought-content,<sup>4</sup> which preserves the same identity, irrespective of context, and thus the understanding is more perfect here than when it is concerned with any other life-expression. But at the same time it says nothing to one who has understood it about its relations to its background nor about the richness of spiritual life. The fundamental character of judgments is such that they do not point back, as it were, to the individual life from which they emerge, so there is no opportunity to penetrate from them into mental structure.

Actions form another class of life-expressions. An action does not originate in an intention to communicate; but information is provided through the relation in which the action stands to its end. Actions are systematically related to the mental states which they express, and this permits assumptions, often correct, to be made about those mental states. But it is very important to distinguish the circumstantially determined condition of the life of the mind, which brings about actions, and of which actions are the expressions, from the total life-structure in which these conditions are grounded. A decisive stimulus determines the deed from among a variety of possibilities. However we may look at them, deeds express only a part of our being. Possibilities that lie within us are destroyed by the deed; the action is detached from the background of the life-structure. And without an explanation which can tie together circumstances, ends and means, and life-structures, no total understanding of the inner life from which they spring is possible.

How different it is with what I may call the spontaneous expression of experience.<sup>5</sup> A special relation exists between it, the life from which it comes, and the understanding which grasps it. It contains more of mental life than can be comprehended by introspection. It lifts mental life out of depths that consciousness cannot illuminate. However, it lies in the nature of expressions of experience that the relations between them and the mental life that is expressed in them can only be determined by the understanding in a very general way. They cannot be judged as being true or false, but only sincere or insincere, because hypocrisy, illusions, even lies falsify the relation between expression and the mental events expressed.

The greatest significance that an expression can have for the human studies depends on a distinction which reveals itself at this point. Whatever has its origin in everyday life is shaped by the interests of the moment; its very meaning changes from hour to hour. There is something terrible in the fact that in the clash of practical interests every expression can deceive, and its significance alter, as alterations in our own position occur. But when in great works of art, a mental event is freed from its creator, we enter an area in which illusion and deception no longer exist. Because of the conditions determining its creation (which we will discuss more fully

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4. Denkinhalt.

5. Erlebnis Ausdruck.

later), no truly great work of art can reflect elements foreign to its creator: indeed, its existence is completely independent of his.

In itself true, it remains fixed, enduring, and thus capable of being correctly, if synthetically, understood. Thus in the area between act and knowledge arises a circle in which life reveals depths which observation, reflection, and theorising are unable to penetrate.

2. *The Simple Forms of Understanding.* Understanding develops at first in response to the demands of practical life. Human beings are placed in contact with one another, and they must make themselves mutually understood; each must know what the other wants. The elementary forms of the understanding are like letters, whose combinations make possible higher forms. By an elementary form I understand the meaning of a single life-expression. Logically this can be presented as the conclusion of a process of reasoning by analogy, suggested by the regular relations which exist between the expressions and that which they express. Indeed, in any of the given classes, single life-expressions can be so presented. A row of letters, set one after another to form words and then sentences, is the expression of a statement. A facial expression indicates to us joy or sorrow. The fundamental acts out of which structurally significant acts are constituted, like the lifting of an object, the striking of a hammer, or the cutting of wood with a saw, make known to us the presence of certain goals. But elementary understanding contains, as it were, no return to the life-complex as a whole, nor does it make us aware of any process of reasoning in which these goals might have their origin.

The fundamental relation upon which the process of elementary understanding rests is that of the expression to what is expressed.<sup>6</sup> Elementary understanding does not proceed by postulating a cause after observing the effect. Neither can we regard it, even with more careful formulation, as a kind of process that leads from the given effect back to some particular part of the life-structure which makes the effect possible. This relation is, of course, inherent in the facts of the case, and thus the temptation is always present to connect the former with the latter, but it can be resisted. Elements which are thus interconnected are related to one another in a special way. Here the relations between life-expressions and mental reality, which are present in all forms of the understanding, are found in their most primitive forms, and it is through this relation that mental life tends to express itself without, however, overpowering the expressions of the senses.

The way in which these two, e.g. the look and the terror, form a unity instead of remaining distinct, is rooted in this fundamental relation between the expression and the mental reality. But now it is time to speak of the fundamental nature of the elementary forms of the understanding itself.

3. *Objective Mind and Elementary Understanding.* Elsewhere we have shown the significance of the objective mind<sup>7</sup> for the possibility of knowl-

6. . . . ist das des Lebenszusammenhang Ausdrucks zu dem was in ihm ausgedrückt ist.

7. Objektive Geist.



edge in the human studies. By objective mind, I understand the manifold forms in which features common to individuals are objectified in the world of the senses. In this objective mind the past is always present to us.<sup>8</sup> Its domain reaches from ways of life and forms of social intercourse to the complex of aims developed by society, to customs, rights, the State, religion, art, science and philosophy. Even works of genius represent a common store of ideas, inner life, and ideals in a particular age and environment. From early childhood on, the self receives nourishment from this world of objective mind, which is also the medium through which we understand other people and their expressions: for everything in which mind has been objectified contains within it something common to both oneself and others. Every tree-lined square, every room in which chairs are arranged, is understandable to us from childhood on because common agreement with respect to goals, laws, and value judgments have allotted to each square and to each room their proper place. The child grows into and shares the laws and customs of the other members of his family; his mother's teachings are absorbed in the context of family life. His introduction to life in the community is well under way even before he learns to speak. He learns to understand expressions and looks, movements and cries, words and sentences, because they are presented in a uniform manner, and because they are regularly used to express the same thing. Thus does the individual orient himself in the world of objective mind. An important consequence for the process of understanding follows from this. The life expression is not, as a general rule, grasped by the individual as an isolated factor, but contains, as it were, a recognition of a common background, and of the inner world of another individual. This ordering of individual expressions in a common background is made easier by the fact that the objective mind is itself ordered. It contains a number of homogeneous complexes, e.g. law and religion, and these have a fixed, regular structure. So it is that the imperatives set down in the Statute books, which are intended to ensure the highest possible degree of conformity to a certain way of life, are connected with a system of court procedures, laws, and arrangements for implementing decisions. Inside such a structure exist a large number of typical orderings. The various individual life-expressions that impress themselves on the understanding can be understood as belonging to a particular category of experience; thus the relationship between life-expressions and mental events which exists within this common experience provides both the fulfilment of the expressed mental event and its incorporation into a common experience. A sentence can be understood because of agreement in a speech community with respect to common meanings, inflections, and syntax. In any given society, it is the established rules of behaviour that make various words, or physical gestures, not only capable of expressing different shades of meaning but of being understood as doing so.

In various countries, craftsmen have developed characteristic methods

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8. In diesem objektiven Geist ist die Vergangenheit dauernde beständige Gegenwart für uns.

and tools in order to attain certain goals. The goals are revealed, as it were, by the methods. In all cases, it is through the incorporation into a common experience that the relation between a life-expression and the mental reality behind it is determined. And so it becomes clear why it is present in the act of understanding the various individual life-expressions, and why, without any conscious unifying activity, both facets of the process are welded into the unity of the understanding. If we try to paint a logical picture of the elementary understanding, then the common experience in which a unity of the expression and the expressed is given will show this connection in any single case. Through the medium of this common experience it will be predicated of the life-expression that it is the expression of mental reality. This is an instance of reasoning by analogy, where the subject infers the predicate, with a fair degree of certainty, from the limited series of cases contained in the common experience.

This briefly outlined theory concerning the difference between the elementary and higher forms of understanding justifies the distinction which has already been made between pragmatic and historical explanation, since it traces that distinction to a difference between the elementary and more complex forms of the understanding itself.

4. *The Higher Forms of Understanding.* The transition from the elementary to the higher forms of understanding is already established in the elementary forms themselves. The further the inner distance between a given life-expression and the individual attempting to understand it, the more often do uncertainties arise. Here we will try to deal with some of them. A first transition to the higher forms comes about when the understanding proceeds from the normal system of life-expressions and the mental reality expressed by them. When as a result of understanding, an inner difficulty or contradiction with what is familiar appears, the individual is led to perform certain tests. He recalls other cases in which the normal relations between expressions and mental events did not hold. Such difficulties occur in those cases where we allow our inner states, our ideas and intentions, to be misinterpreted either when we present an impassive exterior or remain silent. Here it is only a case of the observer having misinterpreted the absence of a life-expression. But in many cases, we must reckon with the possibility that we are being intentionally deceived. Looks, expressions, and words all contradict the inner life. Thus in various ways we are led to bring other life-expressions into play, or to go back into the total life-structure, in order to confirm or reject our misgivings.

From the intercourse of practical life come independent demands for judgments about the character and capabilities of individual men. We reckon continually with evaluations of individual expressions, looks, purposeful actions and combinations of these. These are arrived at by a process of analogy, but our understanding leads us farther. Trade and professional life, commerce, social life and family interests all lead us to try to gain insights into the inner life of men around us in order to determine how far we can rely on them. Here the relation between the expression and the expressed links up with those between the variety of life expressions of another person

and the inner structure that is their basis. These lead us on to take changing circumstance into account as well. Here again an inductive conclusion from individual life-expressions to the entire life-complex lies before us, which presupposes knowledge of the mental life and of its relation to its milieu. The result can be only an approximation to the truth, because the series of life-expressions is limited, and its fundamental structure is unarticulated. Any deduction about the future behavior of the individual, once its total character has been understood through this inductive process, is valid only as an expectation or probability. To advance from the necessarily fallible understanding of a character to a prediction of behavior in new circumstance can give rise, as I have said, to an expectation, but not to a certainty.

But not all of the higher forms of the understanding are rooted in the fundamental relationship between cause and effect.<sup>9</sup> It can be seen how such an assumption does not hold for the case of the elementary forms—but it is true of an important group of the higher forms as well, that they are rooted in the distinction between the expression and the expressed. The understanding of an intellectual creation is, in many cases, directed only towards that structure in which the individual parts of the work, emerging one after another, are built into a whole. Indeed, if we want understanding to yield the best results possible for our knowledge of the mental world, it is most important that we assert this form of knowledge in its full autonomy. A drama is performed. The unliterary spectator is not the only one who can lose himself in the performance without thinking of the construction of the work; even the sophisticated can allow himself to be carried away by what he sees happening. His understanding is then directed toward the structure of the plot, the characterizations, the interplay of events which lead to the *dénouement*. Only then can the true reality of this representation of life be enjoyed; only then can the complete process of understanding and reliving<sup>10</sup> take place as the author desires it. And the only relations that obtain in the area of intellectual creations are those between the expression and the mental life expressed by it. Not until the spectator notices that what he took to be a piece of reality was in fact produced in the poet's mind self-consciously and with artistic intent does the sort of understanding which was ruled by this relationship of life-expression to that which it expresses turn into the sort of understanding which is determined by the relation between cause and effect.

If we were to group together the higher forms of the understanding, we should find their similarity to lie in the fact that they bring together a series of given expressions into a comprehensible structural whole by a process of induction. The fundamental relation which determines the development from outer to inner is either in the first instance that of the expression to the expressed, or, predominantly that of cause and effect. This process rests on the elementary understanding which makes available the elements of the reconstruction. But it is distinguished from the elementary understanding in a way which the nature of the higher understanding makes clear.

9. . . . des Erwirken zum Wirkenden.

10. Nacherleben.

Understanding always has something individual as its object, and in its higher forms it argues from the inductive complex<sup>11</sup> given in a work or a life, to the life-complex of a person or a work. But our analysis of lived experience<sup>12</sup> and of self-understanding has shown that in the world of the mind, the individual is an object of absolute value, and indeed is the only such object that exists. As such we concern ourselves with him, not only as an instance of general human nature, but as an individual whole. This interest occupies us, apart from that practical interest which forces us to concern ourselves with men (for a good part of our life), whether in honorable or evil, foolish or vulgar, ways. The secret of the individual draws us, for its own sake, into ever new and more profound attempts to understand it, and it is in such understanding that the individual and mankind in general and its creations are revealed to us. Here is the most characteristic accomplishment of the understanding for the human studies. The objective mind and the power of the individual to interpret it together determine the world of mind. History rests on the understanding of these two.

We understand individuals by virtue of their affinities with one another, that is to say in virtue of the characteristics common to them. This process presupposes a connection between general human nature and the individuation process which branches out from it into the manifold forms of mental existence. In understanding we accomplish the task of living through<sup>13</sup> in ourselves the process of individuation. The material for carrying out the task is found in the experiential data, as it is brought together by induction.<sup>14</sup> Each datum is individual, and is treated as such in the process of understanding. Each contains a significant element<sup>15</sup> which makes understanding of its particular individuality possible. But the presuppositions of the process take on ever more complicated forms as they penetrate into the individual and as they compare the individual with others, and so the business of understanding goes further and further into the depths of mind. Just as the objective mind contains its own order which is organised into categories, so humanity is ordered in a system that goes from the regularity and structure of humanity in general to the categories through which the understanding grasps individuals. If one begins by recognising that individuals are distinguished, not qualitatively, but through the particular emphasis of particular elements (however this may be expressed psychologically), then it is in this emphasis that the inner principle of individuation lies. And if it were possible, in the act of understanding, to set both principles, i.e. the outer principle of individuation, which is the alteration of mental life and its situation by the environment, and the inner principle of individuation, which is the peculiar emphasis of the various elements of the structure, in operation simultaneously, then the understanding of man, of his literary and poetic works, would become the pathway to the great secret of life. And this is in fact the case. In order to realize this, we must call attention to that

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11. Induktive Zusammennehmen.

12. Erleben.

13. durchleben.

14. die einzelnen Gegebenheiten, wie sie die Induktion zusammen fasst.

15. ein Moment.

element of the understanding which admits of no adequate description in logical formulae.

5. *Projecting, Reproducing, Reliving.*<sup>16</sup> The position which the higher understanding adopts in the face of its object is determined by its task, which is to discover a life-complex in the given. This is only possible because the life-complex already existing in the subject's experience, and lived through in countless ways, is present and available with all its inherent possibilities. This situation, which is part of the problem of understanding, we call a projection of the self into a work or person. Every line of a poem is brought back to life<sup>17</sup> by means of the inner structure of the lived experience, from which the poem originates. Possibilities inherent in the mind are called forth by external expressions brought to apprehension through the operations of the elementary understanding. The soul travels along the accustomed paths by which in earlier, similar situations it suffered and loved, desired and achieved. Countless paths open to the past and to dreams of the future. From the words we read, numberless lines of thought go out. The very fact that the poem sets out an external situation helps the poet's words to evoke an appropriate mood. Here, too, the already familiar relation holds, according to which expressions of experience contain more than lies in the consciousness of the poet or artist, and thus evoke more in the spectator as well.

When the problem of understanding, as it is here, is presented in such a way as to bring into operation the totality of one's own acquired mental structure, then this process can also be called the transference of the self into a given complex of life-expressions. The highest form in which the totality of mental life is operative in the understanding, i.e. reproducing or reliving, arises on the basis of this projection or transposition. The understanding is a process which reverses the direction of the course of events. But complete empathy<sup>18</sup> is dependent on the possibility of the understanding following the order of the events themselves, on its advancing forward as the course of life itself advances. So is the process of self-projection expanded. To relive is to create in the same direction as the original events.<sup>19</sup> So we go forward with the historical process, with an occurrence in a far away country, or with something that happens in the soul of someone near to us. The reliving is complete when the event has passed through the consciousness of a poet, artist, or historian, and lies fixed and enduring before us in their work.

A lyric poem enables us, by the sequence of its lines, to relive a given complex of experience; not the one which inspired the poet, but the one which is put into the mouth of an ideal person, whose source is the poet's own experience. The sequence of scenes in a play renders possible the reliving of the fragments of the lives of the persons presented. The accounts of novelists or historians, which follow the historical process, evoke in us a reliving process. The triumph of reliving is that in it, the fragments of an

16. Hineinversetzen, Nachbilden, Nacherleben.

17. in Leben zurückverwandelt.

18. Mitleben.

19. Nacherleben ist das Schaffen in der Linie des Geschehens.

experience are so completed that we think we have a continuous whole before us.

But in what does reliving consist? The process interests us only in its effects: no psychological explanation will be attempted. We will not go into detail concerning the relations of reliving to sympathy,<sup>20</sup> or empathy, though the connection between them is obvious from the fact that the power of reliving is increased by sympathy. We are concerned primarily with the significant contributions of this reliving to our approach to the world of mind. It rests on two factors: Every lively visualization of a milieu or an external situation stimulates a reliving process in us, while fantasy can strengthen or weaken the emphasis of the forces, feelings, and aspirations which are contained in our own life-complexes and so allow us to reproduce the mental life of others. The curtain rises. Richard appears, and an active imagination can, by following his words, expressions and gestures, relive an experience that lies quite beyond the possibilities of its own real world. The fantastic forest in *As You Like It* puts us in a frame of mind in which we can relive any kind of extravagance.

In this reliving lies an important part of the spiritual gains for which we have to thank the historian and poet. The course of life exercises a determining influence on every man, by which the possibilities which lie within him are narrowed down. His present character determines his further development. In short, whether he is concerned with examining his own situation in life, or contemplating the form of his acquired life-complex, he finds that the prospects of a new outlook on life, or further inner development of his personal character, are limited. But understanding opens to him a whole new realm of possibilities that are not present in his everyday life. The possibility of having religious experiences is circumscribed for me, as it is for most people today. But when I go through the letters and writings of Luther, the opinions of his contemporaries, the acts of religious conferences and councils, and his own official acts, I live through a religious process of such eruptive power, with life and death literally at stake, that it is quite beyond the experience of anyone today. But I can relive it. I can project myself into the circumstances; everything in them urges towards an extraordinary development of the religious sensibility. In monastic life I see a method of communion with the invisible, which fixes the gaze of the monastic soul always in the direction of the other world. Theological controversies become problems of inner existence. I see how that which takes shape in the monasteries is diffused into the lay world by countless means—pulpits, confessionals, lecterns, writings; and I see how councils and religious movements spread the doctrine of the Invisible Church and the Universal Priesthood, and how it relates to the liberation of personality in secular life, and how that which was achieved in the loneliness of the monk's cell, in the bitter struggles of the kind we have just described, was maintained against the opposition of the Church. Christianity as a force which shapes life even in the family, in professions, in politics; this is a new power, which alters the *Zeitgeist* in the towns and everywhere where new work is performed—

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20. Einfühlung.

in the persons of Hans Sachs or Dürer. As Luther puts himself at the head of the movement we relive his development in virtue of a connection between the universally human and the religious sphere, and between the historical destiny of religion and Luther's own individuality. Thus this process lays open to us a religious world in him and in his companions of the early Reformation, which widens our conception of the possibilities in men's lives, possibilities which become accessible to us in this way alone. Though limited by his own nature, man can experience through his imagination other ways of life. To man, hemmed in by circumstances, are yet revealed unknown beauties and areas of life which he can never hope to reach. Stated in a most general way, Man, who is bound and determined by the realities of life, is not only liberated by art—this has often been said—but also by the understanding of history. And this effect of history, which its most recent detractors have overlooked, is increased and deepened as the historical consciousness develops.

6. *Exegesis or Interpretation.*<sup>21</sup> How clearly the process of reliving and reproducing events of the past, or those outside our immediate experience, shows us that understanding is dependent on a personal gift! But since understanding lies, in a significant and permanent fashion, at the basis of historical knowledge, this personal gift has become a technique, which develops with the development of historical consciousness. This development is dependent on the fact that fixed life-expressions lie before the understanding in such a way that they can always be re-examined. The systematic understanding of fixed life-expressions we shall call Exegesis. Since mental life is capable of being objectively understood only when it is completely and creatively, i.e. verbally, expressed, so is the task of exegesis that of interpreting the written records of human existence. This art is the foundation of philology; the science of this art is hermeneutics.

There is a necessary, internal connection between criticism and exegesis of such written records. Criticism develops to help solve the problems of exegesis by establishing correct readings, which involves questioning official documents and behaviour, and popular tradition. Exegesis and criticism have developed, again and again, in the course of their history, new techniques for the solution of their problems, just as the natural sciences have continuously refined their experimental techniques. The transmission of these techniques from one generation of philologists and historians to another depends primarily on the personal influence of the great virtuosos and the tradition of their teaching. Nothing in the natural sciences is as conditioned by personal factors as it is in philology. When hermeneutics succeeded in systematizing itself, it passed into the historical stage in which it tried to establish general methodological rules for all fields. To these rules corresponded theories of artistic creation, which conceived of this creation as an activity which was itself subject to rules. In the great period of the beginnings of the historical consciousness in Germany, this methodology of hermeneutics was placed on a new footing by the philosophical idealism of Frederic Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Boeckh, which based its new and more pro-

21. *Auslegung oder Interpretation.*

found understanding on the observation of intellectual creations, a technique made possible by Fichte, and which Schlegel sought to set up in his outline of the Science of Criticism.

Schleiermacher's bold insight, that it is possible to understand an author better than he understands himself, is founded on this new observation. This paradox contains a truth which is capable of psychological demonstration.

Today hermeneutics is applied in a context which gives to the human studies a new and important task. It has always defended the certainty of the understanding against historical scepticism and subjective will; first, when it attacked allegorical interpretations, then, when it justified the great Protestant teaching of the inherent incomprehensibility of the Bible against the scepticism of the Council of Trent, and then again, when the certainty of its future progress was theoretically secured by Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Boeckh. At the present time hermeneutics must concern itself with general epistemological problems, in order to determine the possibilities of knowledge of the historical world, and the methods of discovering its operations. The fundamental meaning of understanding has thus been made clear: and now we must determine, on the basis of its logical form, its general validity.

We found the point of departure for the determination of the truth content of statements in the human studies in the nature of that experience which is a perception of reality. When an experience is brought to awareness in the first forms of conscious thought, only the relations contained in the experience are noticed. Discursive thinking represents what is contained in the experience. In each experience which is characterized as understanding, understanding is founded primarily on the relation of the expression to what it is it expresses. This relation can be experienced in all its uniqueness. And, as we can get outside the narrow circle of experience only through the interpretation of life-expressions, we can easily see what is the value of understanding for the construction of the human sciences. But it is equally clear that this understanding is not to be seen simply as a bare construction of thought. Transposing, reconstructing, reliving, these facts point to the totality of mental life, which is operative in this process. This totality is connected with the experience itself, which is only a perception of the whole mental reality in a given situation. So in every understanding, there is something irrational, as life itself is irrational; something is incapable of being fully represented by a logical formula. So a final, though wholly subjective certainty, which lies in this reliving, cannot be established by any examination of the logical validity of the reasoning by which the process of understanding can be presented. These are the natural limits of the logical treatment of the understanding.

If we see that there are laws and forms of thought for each part of the science, and that they are related methodologically through their perceptions of reality, then we must begin to see methods of investigation which are in no sense analogous to those of the natural sciences. These methods, however, rest on the relations between life expressions and the inner reality expressed by them.



The first elements which separate themselves out of the mental process of understanding are the grammatical and historical preliminaries, which serve only to put the reader of a work from the past, a foreign country, or an unfamiliar language, into the position of a reader from the author's time and *milieu*.

In the elementary forms of the understanding we can conclude from a number of instances in which a mental reality expresses itself in a series of related life-expressions that these relations indicated that the same relations would hold in a further case. From the repetition of the same meaning, words, gestures and actions, the same conclusions can be drawn. We quickly observe how little such a model, taken by itself, is worth. In reality, as we saw, life expressions are for us, at the same time, representations of something general. We only draw conclusions, in so far as we are able to subsume them under types of actions or gestures, or patterns of linguistic usage. In reasoning from particular instance to particular instance, a relation between the individual represented and the general type is always present. And this relationship becomes clearer when we draw conclusions about a new case, not on the basis of the relation between a series of related life expressions and that which they express, but rather when the individual facts of the case form the basis of an analogical reasoning process. So we conclude from the regular connection between specific characteristics and qualities in a given state of affairs that, when this connection is present in another case, the trait which has not yet been observed will also be shown. It is on the basis of this kind of reasoning that we are able accurately to date a newly discovered religious text, or determine from which mystical brotherhood it emerged. But in such reasoning, there is always the tendency, since in any such structure the various items are connected with one another, to draw conclusions from a particular series of cases so as to reinforce others. When applied to new instances, reasoning by analogy becomes a sort of reasoning by induction. The distinction between these two forms of reasoning, in the process of the understanding, has only a limited validity, and in general one has the right to only a certain limited degree of expectation of the occurrence of the new case. The degree of expectation is one about which no general rules can be given; it can be appraised only in context. It is the task of the logic of the human studies to discover the rules for this appraisal.

So the process of understanding, as here set out, is to be understood as a kind of induction. And this induction belongs not to the class in which a general law is extracted from an incomplete series of cases, but rather in which a structure, an ordered system, is built, which gathers the separate instances into a unity. Induction of this sort is common to the human studies and to the natural sciences: Kepler discovered the elliptical orbit of Mars through such a process of induction. And just as he imposed a geometrical structure, which extracted a simple mathematical regularity from observations and calculations, so must any investigation of the process of understanding give individual words their sense, and give structure to the meaning of the individual components of the whole. What is given is

a succession of words, the meaning of which is only partially determined; its meaning is variable. The potential meanings of words are, within certain limits, numerous; so the meaning is made clear as what is undetermined is clarified through the construction of the sentence. Thus, the significance of the various parts of the work is capable of a variety of interpretations; its meaning must be interpreted from the whole.

## CROCE (1866-1952)

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BORN AT PESCIASSEROLI in Aquila in 1866, Benedetto Croce was a student at the University of Rome, his early interests being primarily historical and antiquarian. In 1910 he became a senator, and in the years 1920-21 he was Minister of Education in the Italian government. But the rise of Fascism, to which Croce remained opposed throughout the whole of its career, brought his participation in public affairs to an end. He died in 1952.

Croce is not easy to read; he was an untidy expositor of his ideas, and the strange mixture of shrewd common sense and Idealist philosophizing, which is a feature of much of his writing, is often disconcerting. From the start he was concerned with problems arising out of historical inquiry, and with the status of historical judgments. In an early essay, written in 1893,\* he suggested that the historian's activity should be compared with that of the artist rather than with that of the scientist. For what the artist and the historian have in common is the task of comprehending things and happenings in their unique particularity: unlike the scientist, they do not treat individual events as instances of universal laws, nor do they seek to classify them under abstract categories. Although he was subsequently to qualify this position in various respects, Croce's philosophical system as it developed in the books that followed—the *Aesthetic* (1902), the *Logic* (1909) and *History—Its Theory and Practice* (1916)—presupposed a fundamental distinction between historical and scientific knowledge.

This distinction was drawn in the light of a general division assumed to exist between different forms of mental activity. Croce interpreted scientific propositions in a pragmatic way; they are not true or false, but useful; likewise scientific concepts are "pseudo-concepts," arbitrary constructions, the function of which is to enable us to formulate theories

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\* *La Storia ridotta sotto il concetto dell'Arte.*

and hypotheses about the world in a way that makes it possible to predict and control the occurrence of natural phenomena. This is not the case with historical judgments, and Croce seems sometimes to imply that all true knowledge is historical knowledge—philosophy and history being (in a sense far from easy to understand) one and the same. In the historical judgment, Croce claims, apprehension of the individual is combined with recognition of the universal; and by this he appears partly to mean that, while what the subject-term of such a judgment refers to is a particular thing, person, or event, the predicate is necessarily a general concept which the referent of the subject-term instantiates. Taken by itself, such a characterization of historical thinking would not seem to be particularly illuminating or to justify Croce in according to historical knowledge a distinctive status.

There were, however, more substantial grounds upon which Croce wished to distinguish history from other types of inquiry. History is marked by the fact that the historian, insofar as he is proceeding as a historian and not as a mere chronicler, "lives again in imagination individuals and events"; he regards his material as being essentially the expression of human thought and feeling, thought and feeling which he must reconstruct and re-think for himself. In thus emphasizing the essential "inwardness" of history Croce believed that he was laying bare the conditions which make historical description and interpretation possible; it is in virtue of the mental life the historian is capable of sharing with those whom he studies that the concepts he applies to them have meaning and intelligibility. Although Croce sometimes put this point in a very strange fashion—it is to be found embedded amongst ideas of a more mystical kind which, if taken at their face value, would suggest a highly subjective conception of historical knowledge—it is one that recurs again and again in his writing. The following extracts express the sort of thing he had in mind.

Sometimes, as in the last paragraph of the first selection, Croce presses his ideas to a point where even his English admirer, R. G. Collingwood, was unable to follow him.

## 1. History and Chronicle\*

*True History Is Contemporary History.* "Contemporary history" is wont to be called the history of a passage of time, looked upon as a most recent

\*This selection consists of the major part of Chapter I and the conclusion of Chapter IX of *History — Its Theory and Practice*. All extracts from Croce are in the translation by Douglas Ainslie and are copyright by George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., with whose permission they are reprinted.

past, whether it be that of the last fifty years, a decade, a month, a day, or indeed of the last hour or of the last minute. But if we think and speak rigorously, the term "contemporaneous" can be applied only to that history which comes into being immediately after the act which is being accomplished, as consciousness of that act: it is, for instance, the history that I make of myself while I am in the act of composing these pages; it is the thought of my composition, linked of necessity to the work of composition. "Contemporary" would be well employed in this case, just because this, like every act of the spirit, is outside time (of the first and after) and is formed "at the same time" as the act to which it is linked, and from which it is distinguished by means of a distinction not chronological but ideal. "Non-contemporary history," "past history," would, on the other hand, be that which finds itself in the presence of a history already formed, and which thus comes into being as a criticism of that history, whether it be thousands of years or hardly an hour old.

But if we look more closely, we perceive that this history already formed, which is called or which we would like to call "non-contemporary" or "past" history, if it really is history, that is to say, if it means something and is not an empty echo, is also *contemporary*, and does not in any way differ from the other. As in the former case, the condition of its existence is that the deed of which the history is told must vibrate in the soul of the historian, or (to employ the expression of professed historians) that the documents are before the historian and that they are intelligible. That a narrative or a series of narratives of the fact is united and mingled with it merely means that the fact has proved more rich, not that it has lost its quality of being present: what were narratives or judgments before are now themselves facts, 'documents' to be interpreted and judged. History is never constructed from narratives, but always from documents, or from narratives that have been reduced to documents and treated as such. Thus if contemporary history springs straight from life, so too does that history which is called non-contemporary, for it is evident that only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact. Therefore this past fact does not answer to a past interest, but to a present interest, in so far as it is unified with an interest of the present life. This has been said again and again in a hundred ways by historians in their empirical formulas, and constitutes the reason, if not the deeper content, of the success of the very trite saying that history is *magister vitae*.

I have recalled these forms of historical technique in order to remove the aspect of paradox from the proposition that "every true history is contemporary history." But the justice of this proposition is easily confirmed and copiously and perspicuously exemplified in the reality of historiographical work, provided always that we do not fall into the error of taking the works of the historians all together, or certain groups of them confusedly, and of applying them to an abstract man or to ourselves considered abstractly, and of then asking what present interest leads to the writing or reading of such histories: for instance, what is the present interest of the history which recounts the Peloponnesian or the Mithradatic War, of the

events connected with Mexican art, or with Arabic philosophy. For me at the present moment they are without interest, and therefore for me at this present moment those histories are not histories, but at the most simply titles of historical works. They have been or will be histories in those that have thought or will think them, and so too when I have thought or shall think them, re-elaborating them according to my spiritual needs. If, on the other hand, we limit ourselves to real history, to the history that one really thinks in the act of thinking, it will be easily seen that this is perfectly identical with the most personal and contemporary of histories. When the development of the culture of my historical moment presents to me (it would be superfluous and perhaps also inexact to add to myself as an individual) the problem of Greek civilization or of Platonic philosophy or of a particular mode of Attic manners, that problem is related to my being in the same way as the history of a bit of business in which I am engaged, or of a love affair in which I am indulging, or of a danger that threatens me. I examine it with the same anxiety and am troubled with the same sense of unhappiness until I have succeeded in solving it. Hellenic life is on that occasion present in me; it solicits, it attracts and torments me, in the same way as the appearance of the adversary, of the loved one, or of the beloved son for whom one trembles. Thus too it happens or has happened or will happen in the case of the Mithradatic War, of Mexican art, and of all the other things that I have mentioned above by way of example.

Having laid it down that contemporaneity is not the characteristic of a class of histories (as is held with good reason in empirical classifications), but an intrinsic characteristic of every history, we must conceive the relation of history to life as that of *unity*; certainly not in the sense of abstract identity, but of synthetic unity, which implies both the distinction and the unity of the terms. Thus to talk of a history of which the documents are lacking would appear to be as extravagant as to talk of the existence of something as to which it is also affirmed that it is without one of the essential conditions of existence. A history without relation to the document would be unverifiable history; and since the reality of history lies in this verifiability, and the narrative in which it is given concrete form is historical narrative only in so far as it is a *critical exposition* of the document (intuition and reflection, consciousness and auto-consciousness, etc.), a history of that sort, being without meaning and without truth, would be nonexistent as history. How could a history of painting be composed by one who had not seen and enjoyed the works of which he proposed to describe the genesis critically? And how far could anyone understand the works in question who was without the artistic experience assumed by the narrator? How could there be a history of philosophy without the works or at least fragments of the works of the philosophers? How could there be a history of a sentiment or of a custom, for example that of Christian humility or of knightly chivalry, without the capacity for living again, or rather without an actual living again of these particular states of the individual soul?

On the other hand, once the indissoluble link between life and thought in history has been effected, the doubts that have been expressed as to the *certainty* and the *utility* of history disappear altogether in a moment.

How could that which is a *present* producing of our spirit ever be *uncertain*? How could that knowledge be *useless* which solves a problem that has come forth from the bosom of *life*?

*History and Living Documents.* But can the link between document and narrative, between life and history, ever be broken? An affirmative answer to this has been given when referring to those histories of which the documents have been lost, or, to put the case in a more general and fundamental manner, those histories whose documents are no longer alive in the human spirit. And this has also been implied when saying that we all of us in turn find ourselves thus placed with respect to this or that part of history. The history of Hellenic painting is in great part a history without documents for us, as are all histories of peoples concerning whom one does not know exactly where they lived, the thoughts and feelings that they experienced, or the individual appearance of the works that they accomplished; those literatures and philosophies, too, as to which we do not know their theses, or even when we possess these and are able to read them through, yet fail to grasp their intimate spirit, either owing to the lack of complementary knowledge or because of our obstinate temperamental reluctance, or owing to our momentary distraction.

If, in these cases, when that connection is broken, we can no longer call what remains history (because history was nothing but that connexion), and it can henceforth only be called history in the sense that we call a man the corpse of a man, what remains is not for that reason nothing (not even the corpse is really nothing). Were it nothing, it would be the same as saying that the connexion is indissoluble, because nothingness is never effectual. And if it be not nothing, if it be something, what is narrative without the document?

A history of Hellenic painting, according to the accounts that have been handed down or have been constructed by the learned of our times, when closely inspected, resolves itself into a series of names of painters (Apollodorus, Polygnotus, Zeuxis, Apelles, etc.), surrounded with biographical anecdotes, and into a series of subjects for painting (the burning of Troy, the contest of the Amazons, the battle of Marathon, Achilles, Calumny, etc.), of which certain particulars are given in the descriptions that have reached us; or a graduated series, going from praise to blame, of these painters and their works, together with names, anecdotes, subjects, judgments, arranged more or less chronologically. But the names of painters separated from the direct knowledge of their works are empty names; the anecdotes are empty, as are the descriptions of subjects, the judgment of approval or of disapproval, and the chronological arrangement, because merely arithmetical and lacking real development; and the reason why we do not realize it in thought is that the elements which should constitute it are wanting. If those verbal forms possess any significance, we owe it to what little we know of antique paintings from fragments, from secondary works that have come down to us in copies, or in analogous works in the other arts, or in poetry. With the exception, however, of that little, the history of Hellenic art is, as such, a tissue of empty words.

We can, if we like, say that it is 'empty of determinate content,' because

we do not deny that when we pronounce the name of a painter we think of some painter, and indeed of a painter who is an Athenian, and that when we utter the word 'battle,' or 'Helen,' we think of a battle, indeed of a battle of hoplites, or of a beautiful woman, similar to those familiar to us in Hellenic sculpture. But we can think indifferently of any one of the numerous facts that those names recall. For this reason their content is indeterminate, and this indetermination of content is their emptiness.

All histories separated from their living documents resemble these examples and are empty narratives, and since they are empty they are without truth. Is it true or not that there existed a painter named Polygnotus and that he painted a portrait of Miltiades in the Poecile? We shall be told that it is true, because one person or several people, who knew him and saw the work in question, bear witness to its existence. But we must reply that it was true for this or that witness, and that for us it is neither true nor false, or (which comes to the same thing) that it is true only on the evidence of those witnesses—that is to say, for an extrinsic reason, whereas truth always requires intrinsic reasons. And since that proposition is not true (neither true nor false), it is not useful either, because where there is nothing the king loses his rights, and where the elements of a problem are wanting the effective will and the effective need to solve it are also wanting, along with the possibility of its solution. Thus to quote those empty judgments is quite useless for our actual lives. Life is a present, and that history which has become an empty narration is a past: it is an irrevocable past, if not absolutely so then certainly for the present moment.

The empty words remain, and the empty words are sounds, or the graphic signs which represent them, and they hold together and maintain themselves, not by an act of thought that thinks them (in which case they would soon be filled), but by an act of will, which thinks it useful for certain ends of its own to preserve those words, however empty or half empty they may be. Mere narrative, then, is nothing but a complex of empty words or formulas asserted by an act of the will.

*History Is Prior to Chronicle.* Now with this definition we have succeeded in giving neither more nor less than the true distinction, hitherto sought in vain, between *history* and *chronicle*. It has been sought in vain, because it has generally been sought in a difference in the *quality* of the facts which each difference took as its object. Thus, for instance, the record of *individual* facts has been attributed to chronicle, to history that of *general* facts; to chronicle the record of *private*, to history that of *public* facts: as though the general were not always individual and the individual general, and the public were not always also private and the private public! Or else the record of *important* facts (memorable things) has been attributed to history, to chronicle that of the *unimportant*: as though the importance of facts were not relative to the situation in which we find ourselves, and as though for a man annoyed by a mosquito the evolutions of the minute insect were not of greater importance than the expedition of Xerxes! Certainly, we are sensible of a just sentiment in these fallacious distinc-

tions—namely, that of placing the difference between history and chronicle in the conception of what *interests* and of what does not *interest* (the general interests and not the particular, the great interests and not the little, etc.). A just sentiment is also to be noted in other considerations that are wont to be adduced, such as the close bond between events that there is in history and the *disconnectedness* that appears on the other hand in chronicle, the *logical* order of the first, the purely *chronological* order of the second, the penetration of the first into the *core* of events and the limitation of the second to the superficial or *external*, and the like. But the differential character is here rather metaphorized than thought, and when metaphors are not employed as simple forms expressive of thought we lose a moment after what has just been gained. The truth is that chronicle and history are not distinguishable as two forms of history, mutually complementary, nor as one subordinate to the other, but as two different spiritual *attitudes*. History is living chronicle, chronicle is dead history; history is contemporary history, chronicle is past history; history is principally an act of thought, chronicle an act of will. Every history becomes chronicle when it is no longer thought, but only recorded in abstract words, which were once upon a time concrete and expressive. The history of philosophy even is chronicle, when written or read by those who do not understand philosophy: history would even be what we are now disposed to read as chronicle, as when, for instance, the monk of Monte Cassino notes: 1001. *Beatus Dominicus migravit ad Christum*. 1002. *Hoc anno venerunt Saraceni super Capuam*. 1004. *Terremotus ingens hunc montem exagitavit*, etc.; for those facts were present to him when he wept over the death of the departed Dominic, or was terrified by the natural human scourges that convulsed his native land, seeing the hand of God in that succession of events. This does not prevent that history from assuming the form of chronicle when the same monk of Monte Cassino wrote down cold formulas, without representing to himself or thinking their content, with the sole intention of not allowing those memories to be lost and of handing them down to those who should inhabit Monte Cassino after him.

But the discovery of the real distinction between chronicle and history, which is a formal distinction (that is to say, a truly real distinction), not only frees us from the sterile and fatiguing search after material distinctions (that is to say, imaginary distinctions), but it also enables us to reject a very common presupposition—namely, that of the *priority* of chronicle in respect to history. *Primo annales* (chronicles) *fuere, post historiarum factae sunt*, the saying of the old grammarian, Mario Vittorino, has been repeated, generalized, and universalized. But precisely the opposite of this is the outcome of the inquiry into the character and therefore into the genesis of the two operations or attitudes: *first comes history, then chronicle*. First comes the living being, then the corpse; and to make history the child of chronicle is the same thing as to make the living be born from the corpse, which is the residue of life, as chronicle is the residue of history. . . .

*The Spirit Itself Is History*. But there must be a reason why chronicle



as well as documents seems to precede history and to be its extrinsic source. The human spirit preserves the mortal remains of history, empty narratives and chronicles, and the same spirit collects the traces of past life, remains and documents, striving as far as possible to preserve them unchanged and to restore them as they deteriorate. What is the object of these acts of will which go to the preservation of what is empty and dead? Perhaps illusion or foolishness, which preserves a little while the worn-out elements of mortality on the confines of Dis by means of the erection of mausoleums and sepulchres? But sepulchres are not foolishness and illusion; they are, on the contrary, an act of morality, by which is affirmed the immortality of the work done by individuals. Although dead, they live in our memory and will live in the memory of times to come. And that collecting of dead documents and writing down of empty histories is an act of life which serves life. The moment will come when they will serve to reproduce past history, enriched and made present to our spirit.

For dead history revives, and past history again becomes present, as the development of life demands them. The Romans and the Greeks lay in their sepulchres, until awakened at the Renaissance by the new maturity of the European spirit. The primitive forms of civilization, so gross and so barbaric, lay forgotten, or but little regarded, or misunderstood, until that new phase of the European spirit, which was known as Romanticism or Restoration, "sympathized" with them—that is to say, recognized them as its own proper present interest. Thus great tracts of history which are now chronicle for us, many documents now mute, will in their turn be traversed with new flashes of life and will speak again.

These revivals have altogether interior motives, and no wealth of documents or of narratives will bring them about; indeed, it is they themselves that copiously collect and place before themselves the documents and narratives, which without them would remain scattered and inert. And it will be impossible ever to understand anything of the effective process of historical thought unless we start from the principle that the spirit itself is history, maker of history at every moment of its existence, and also the result of all anterior history. Thus the spirit bears with it all its history, which coincides with itself. To forget one aspect of history and to remember another one is nothing but the rhythm of the life of the spirit, which operates by determining and individualizing itself, and by always rendering indeterminate and disindividualizing previous determinations and individualizations, in order to create others more copious. The spirit, so to speak, lives again its own history without those external things called narratives and documents; but those external things are instruments that it makes for itself, acts preparatory to that internal vital evocation in whose process they are resolved. The spirit asserts and jealously preserves "records of the past" for that purpose. . . .

*Natural History and Human History.* What substantial difference can ever be discovered on the one hand between geological stratifications and the remains of vegetables and animals, of which it is possible to construct a prospective and indeed a serial arrangement, but which it is

never possible to rethink in the living dialectic of their genesis, and on the other hand the relics of what is called human history, and not only that called prehistorical, but even the historical documents of our history of yesterday, which we have forgotten and no longer understand, and which we can certainly classify and arrange in a series, and build castles in the air about or allow our fancies to wander among, but which it is no longer possible really to think again? Both cases, which have been arbitrarily distinguished, are reducible to one single case. Even in what is called "human history" there exists a "natural history," and what is called "natural history" also was once "human" history—that is to say, spiritual, although to us who have left it so far behind it seems to be almost foreign, so mummified and mechanized has it become, if we glance at it but summarily and from the outside. Do you wish to understand the true history of a Ligurian or Sicilian neolithic man? First of all, try if it be possible to make yourself mentally into a Ligurian or Sicilian neolithic man; and if it be not possible, or you do not care to do this, content yourself with describing and classifying and arranging in a series the skulls, the utensils, and the inscriptions belonging to those neolithic peoples. Do you wish to understand the history of a blade of grass? First and foremost, try to make yourself into a blade of grass, and if you do not succeed, content yourself with analysing the parts and even with disposing them in a kind of imaginative history. This leads to the idea from which I started in making these observations about historiography, as to history being *contemporary* history and chronicle being *past* history. We take advantage of the idea and at the same time confirm that truth by solving with its aid the antithesis between a history that is "history" and a "history of nature," which, although it is history, was supposed to obey laws strangely at variance with those of the only history. It solves this antithesis by placing the second in the lower rank of *pseudo-history*.

## 2. Historical Determinism and the "Philosophy of History"\*

[Croce's objections to theories which attempted to portray history either as proceeding according to plan towards a particular goal (what he called "philosophy of history") or as conforming to some causally determined scheme are given in a chapter entitled "Ideal Genesis and Dissolution of the 'Philosophy of History.'" He believed that theories

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\*This selection is from Chapter IV of *History—Its Theory and Practice*.

of both kinds made the fundamental mistake of treating the facts of history in a "naturalistic" fashion; they failed, that is to say, to interpret historical events as expressive of human attitudes, purposes, interests and so forth which can only be grasped by the insight and understanding of the historian, and regarded them instead as if they could be assimilated to mere "events of nature," to be classified, arranged and subsumed under laws in a purely external way. The deterministic position was for him exemplified by the maxim of the nineteenth-century historian, Taine: "*Après la collection des faits, la recherche des causes.*" The notion of the "brute," opaque fact, which Croce held to be presupposed by such formulae, is unacceptable from a historical point of view.]

The conception of the so-called "philosophy of history" is perpetually opposed to and resisted by the deterministic conception of history. Not only is this clearly to be seen from inspection, but it is also quite evident logically, because the "philosophy of history" represents the transcendental conception of the real, determinism the immanent.

But on examining the facts it is not less certain that historical determinism perpetually generates the "philosophy of history"; nor is this fact less evidently logical than the preceding, because determinism is naturalism, and therefore immanent, certainly, but insufficiently and falsely immanent. Hence it should rather be said that it wishes to be, but is not, immanent, and whatever its efforts may be in the contrary direction, it becomes converted into transcendency. All this does not present any difficulty to one who has clearly in mind the conceptions of the transcendent and of the immanent, of the philosophy of history as transcendency and of the deterministic or naturalistic conception of history as a false immanence. But it will be of use to see in more detail how this process of agreements and oppositions is developed and solved with reference to the problem of history.

"First collect the facts, then connect them causally"; this is the way that the work of the historian is represented in the deterministic conception. *Après la collection des faits, la recherche des causes*, to repeat the very common formula in the very words of one of the most eloquent and picturesque theorists of that school, Taine. Facts are brute, dense, real indeed, but not illumined with the light of science, not intellectualized. This intelligible character must be conferred upon them by means of the search for causes. But it is very well known what happens when one fact is linked to another as its cause, forming a chain of causes and effects: we thus inaugurate an infinite regression, and we never succeed in finding the cause or causes to which we can finally attach the chain that we have been so industriously putting together.

Some, maybe many, of the theorists of history get out of the difficulty in a truly simple manner: they break or let fall at a certain point their chain, which is already broken at another point at the other end (the effect which they have undertaken to consider). They operate with their fragment of chain as though it were something perfect and closed in itself, as though

a straight line divided at two points should include space and be a figure. Hence, too, the doctrine that we find among the methodologists of history: that it is only necessary for history to seek out "proximate" causes. This doctrine is intended to supply a logical foundation to the above process. But who can ever say what are the "proximate causes?" Thought, since it is admitted that it is unfortunately obliged to think according to the chain of causes, will never wish to know anything but "true" causes, be they near or distant in space and time (space, like time, *ne fait rien à l'affaire*). In reality, this theory is a fig-leaf, placed there to cover a proceeding of which the historian, who is a thinker and a critic, is ashamed, an act of will which is useful, but which for that very reason is wilful. The fig-leaf, however, is a sign of modesty, and as such has its value, because, if shame be lost, there is a risk that it will finally be declared that the "causes" at which an arbitrary halt has been made are the "ultimate" causes, the "true" causes, thus raising the caprice of the individual to the rank of an act creative of the world, treating it as though it were God, the God of certain theologians, whose caprice is truth. I should not wish again to quote Taine just after having said this, for he is a most estimable author, not on account of his mental constitution, but of his enthusiastic faith in science; yet it suits me to quote him nevertheless. Taine, in his search for causes, having reached a cause which he sometimes calls the "race" and sometimes the "age," as for instance in his history of English literature, when he reaches the concept of the "man of the North" or "German," with the character and intellect that would be suitable to such a person—coldness of the senses, love of abstract ideas, grossness of taste, and contempt for order and regularity—gravely affirms: "Here research stops; we have come upon some primitive disposition, on some characteristic proper to all the sensations, to all the conceptions of a century or of a race, on some peculiarity inseparable from the undertakings of his spirit and his heart. Here are the basic causes, the causes which are universal and lasting." What that primitive and insurmountable thing contained was known to Taine's imagination, but criticism is ignorant of it; for criticism demands that the genesis of the facts or groups of facts designated as "age" and "race" should be given, and in demanding their genesis declares that they are neither "universal" nor "permanent," because no universal and permanent "facts" are known, as far as I am aware, certainly not *le Germain* and *l'homme du Nord*; nor are mummy facts, though they last some thousands of years, but not for ever—they change gradually, but they do change.

Thus whoever adopts the deterministic conception of history, provided that he decides to abstain from cutting short the inquiry that he has undertaken in an arbitrary and fanciful manner, is of necessity obliged to recognize that the method adopted does not attain the desired end. And since he has begun to think history, although by means of an insufficient method, no course remains to him save that of beginning all over again and following a different path, or that of going forward but changing his direction. The naturalistic presupposition, which still holds its ground ("first collect the facts, then seek the causes": what is more evident and more unavoidable

than that?), necessarily leads to the second alternative. But to adopt the second alternative is to supersede determinism, it is to transcend nature and its causes, it is to propose a method opposite to that hitherto followed—that is to say, to renounce the category of cause for another, which cannot be anything but that of end, an extrinsic and transcendental end, which is the analogous opposite, corresponding to the cause. Now the search for the transcendental end is the “philosophy of history.”

The consequent naturalist (I mean by this he who “continues to think,” or, as is generally said, to draw the consequences) cannot avoid this inquiry, nor does he ever avoid it, in whatever manner he conceive his new inquiry. This he cannot even do, when he tries, by declaring that the end or “ultimate cause” is unknowable, because (as elsewhere remarked) an unknowable affirmed is an unknowable in some way known. Naturalism is always crowned with a philosophy of history, whatever its mode of formulation: whether it explain the universe as composed of atoms that strike one another and produce history by means of their various shocks and gyrations, to which they can also put an end by returning to their primitive state of dispersion, whether the hidden God be termed Matter or the Unconscious or something else, or whether, finally, He be conceived as an Intelligence which avails itself of the chain of causes in order to actualize His counsels. And every philosopher of history is on the other hand a naturalist, because he is a dualist and conceives a God and a world, an idea and a fact in addition to or beneath the Idea, a kingdom of ends and a kingdom or sub-kingdom of causes, a celestial city and one that is more or less diabolical or terrene. Take any deterministic historical work and you will find or discover in it, explicit or understood, transcendency (in Taine, for example, it goes by the name of “race” or of “siècle,” which are true and proper deities); take any work of ‘philosophy of history’ and dualism and naturalism will be found there (in Hegel, for example, when he admits rebellious and impotent facts which resist or are unworthy the dominion of the idea). And we shall see more and more clearly how from the entrails of naturalism comes inevitably forth the “philosophy of history.”

But the “philosophy of history” is just as contradictory as the deterministic conception from which it arises and to which it is opposed. Having both accepted and superseded the method of linking brute facts together, it no longer finds facts to link (for these have already been linked together, as well as might be, by means of the category of cause), but brute facts, on which it must confer rather a “meaning” than a linking, representing them as aspects of a transcendental process, a theophany. Now those facts, in so far as they are brute facts, are mute, and the transcendency of the process requires an organ, not that of thought that thinks or produces facts, but an extra-logical organ, in order to be conceived and represented (such, for example, as thought which proceeds abstractly *a priori*, in the manner of Fichte), and this is not to be found in the spirit, save as a negative moment, as the void of effective logical thought. The void of logical thought is immediately filled with *praxis*, or what is called sentiment,

which then appears as poetry, by theoretical refraction. There is an evident poetical character running through all "philosophies of history." Those of antiquity represented historical events as strife between the gods of certain peoples or of certain races or protectors of certain individuals, or between the god of light and truth and the powers of darkness and lies. They thus expressed the aspirations of peoples, groups, or individuals toward hegemony, or of man toward goodness and truth. The most modern of modern forms is that inspired by various national and ethical feelings (the Italian, the Germanic, the Slav, etc.), or which represents the course of history as leading to the kingdom of liberty, or as the passage from the Eden of primitive communism, through the Middle Ages of slavery, servitude, and wages, toward the restoration of communism, which shall no longer be unconscious but conscious, no longer Edenic but human. In poetry, facts are no longer facts but words, not reality but images, and so there would be no occasion to censure them, if it remained pure poetry. But it does not so remain, because those images and words are placed there as ideas and facts—that is to say, as myths: progress, liberty, economy, technique, science are myths, in so far as they are looked upon as agents external to the facts. They are myths no less than God and the Devil, Mars and Venus, Jove and Baal, or any other cruder forms of divinity. And this is the reason why the deterministic conception, after it has produced the "philosophy of history," which opposes it, is obliged to oppose its own daughter in its turn, and to appeal from the realm of ends to that of causal connexions, from imagination to observation, from myths to facts.

The reciprocal confutation of historical determinism and the philosophy of history, which makes of each a void or a nothing—that is to say, a single void or nothing—seems to the eclectics as usual to be the reciprocal fulfilment of two entities, which effect or should effect an alliance for mutual support. And since eclecticism flourishes in contemporary philosophy, *mutato nomine*, it is not surprising that besides the duty of investigating the causes to history also is assigned that of ascertaining the "meaning" or "general plan" of the course of history (see the works on the philosophy of history of Labriola, Simmel, and Rickert). Since, too, writers on method are wont to be empirical and therefore eclectic, we find that with them also history is divided into the history which unites and criticizes documents and reconstructs events, and "philosophy of history" (see Bernheim's manual, typical of all of them). Finally, since ordinary thought is eclectic, nothing is more easy than to find agreement as to the thesis that simple history, which presents the series of facts, does not suffice, but that it is necessary that thought should return to the already constituted chain of events, in order to discover there the hidden design and to answer the questions as to whence we come and whither we go. This amounts to saying that a "philosophy of history" must be posited side by side with history. This eclecticism, which gives substance to two opposite voids and makes them join hands, sometimes attempts to surpass itself and to mingle those two fallacious sciences or parts of science. Then we hear "philosophy of history" defended, but with the caution that it must be conducted with

"scientific" and "positive" method, by means of the search for the cause, thus revealing the action of divine reason or providence.<sup>1</sup> Ordinary thought quickly coosents to this programme, but afterward fails to carry it out.<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing new here either for those who know: "philosophy of history" to be constructed by means of "positive methods," transcendency to be demonstrated by means of the methods of false immanence, is the exact equivalent in the field of historical studies to that "metaphysic to be constructed by means of the experimental method" which was recommended by the neocritics (Zeller and others), for it claimed, not indeed to supersede two voids that reciprocally confute one another, but to make them agree together, and, after having given substance to them, to combine them in a single substance. I should not like to describe the impossibilities contained in the above as the prodigies of an alchemist (the metaphor seems to be too lofty), but rather as the medleys of bad cooks.

The true remedy for the contradictions of historical determinism and of the "philosophy of history" is quite other than this. To obtain it, we must accept the result of the preceding confutation, which shows that both are futile, and reject, as lacking thought, both the "designs" of the philosophy of history and the causal chains of determinism. When these two shadows have been dispersed we shall find ourselves at the starting-place: we are again face to face with disconnected brute facts, with facts that are connected, but not understood, for which determinism had tried to employ the cement of casuality, the "philosophy of history," the magic wand of finality. What shall we do with these facts? How shall we make them clear rather than dense as they were, organic rather than inorganic, intelligible rather than unintelligible? Truly, it seems difficult to do anything with them especially to effect their desired transformation. The spirit is helpless before that which is, or is supposed to be, external to it. And when facts are understood in that way we are apt to assume again that attitude of contempt of the philosophers for history which has been well-nigh constant since antiquity almost to the end of the eighteenth century (for Aristotle history was "less philosophical" and less serious than poetry, for Sextus Empiricus it was "unmethodical material"; Kant did not feel or understand history). The attitude amounts to this: leave ideas to the philosophers and brute facts to the historians—let us be satisfied with serious things and leave their toys to the children.

1. See, for example, the work of Flint; but since, less radical than Flint, Hegel and the Hegelians themselves also ended in admitting the concurrence of the two opposed methods, traces of this perversion are also to be found in their "philosophies of history." Here, too, is to be noted the false analogy by which Hegel was led to discover the same relation between *a priori* and historical facts as between mathematics and natural facts: *Man muss mit dem Kreise dessen, worin die Prinzipien fallen, wenn man es so nennen will, a priori vertraut sein, so gut als Kepler mit den Ellipsen, mit Kuben und Quadroten und mit den Gedanken von Verhältnissen derselben a priori schon vorher bekannt sein musste, ehe er aus den empirischen Daten seine unsterblichen Gesetze, welche aus Bestimmungen jener Kreise von Vorstellungen bestehen, erfinden konnte.* (Cf. Vorles. ub. d. Philos. d. Gesch., ed. Brunstäd, pp. 107-108.)

2. Not even the above-mentioned Flint carried it out, for he lost himself in preliminaries of historical documentation and never proceeded to the promised construction.

But before having recourse to such a temptation, it will be prudent to ask counsel of methodical doubt (which is always most useful), and to direct the attention precisely upon those brute and disconnected facts from which the causal method claims to start and before which we, who are now abandoned by it and by its complement, the philosophy of history, appear to find ourselves again. Methodical doubt will suggest above all things the thought that those facts are a *presupposition* that has *not been proved*, and it will lead to the inquiry to *whether the proof can be obtained*. Having attempted the proof, we shall finally arrive at the conclusion that *those facts really do not exist*.

For who, as a matter of fact, affirms their existence? Precisely the spirit, at the moment when it is about to undertake the search for causes. But when accomplishing that act the spirit does not already possess the brute facts (*d'abord la collection des faits*) and then seek the causes (*après, la recherche des causes*); but it makes the *facts brute* by that very act—that is to say, it posits them itself in that way, because it is of use to it to posit them. The search for causes, undertaken by history, is not in any way different from the procedure of naturalism, already several times illustrated, which abstractly analyzes and classifies reality. And to illustrate abstractly and to classify implies at the same time to judge in classifying—that is to say, to treat facts, not as acts of the spirit, conscious in the spirit that thinks them, but as external brute facts. The *Divine Comedy* is that poem which we create again in our imagination in all its particulars as we read it and which we understand critically as a particular determination of the spirit, and to which we therefore assign its place in history, with all its surroundings and all its relations. But when this actuality of our thought and imagination has come to an end—that is to say, when that mental process is completed—we are able, by means of a new act of the spirit, separately to analyze its elements. Thus, for instance, we shall classify the concepts relating to "Florentine civilization," or to "political poetry," and say that the *Divine Comedy* was an effect of Florentine civilization, and this in its turn an effect of the strife of the communes, and the like. We shall also thus have prepared the way for those absurd problems which used to annoy de Sanctis so much in relation to the work of Dante, and which he admirably described when he said that they arise only when lively aesthetic expression has grown cold and poetical work has fallen into the hands of dillards addicted to trifles. But if we stop in time and do not enter the path of those absurdities, if we restrict ourselves purely and simply to the naturalistic moment, to classification, and to the classificatory judgment (which is also causal connexion), in an altogether practical manner, without drawing any deductions from it, we shall have done nothing that is not perfectly legitimate; indeed, we shall be exercising our right and bowing to a rational necessity, which is that of naturalizing, when naturalization is of use, but not beyond those limits. Thus the materialization of the facts and the external or causal binding of them together are altogether justified as pure naturalism. And even the maxim which bids us to stop at "proximate" causes—that is to say, not to force classification so far that it loses all practical utility—



will find its justification. To place the concept of the *Divine Comedy* in relation to that of "Florentine civilization" may be of use, but it will be of no use whatever, or infinitely less use, to place it in relation to the class of "Indo-European civilization" or to the "civilization of the white man."

Let us then return with greater confidence to the point of departure, the true point of departure—that is to say, not to that of facts already disorganized and naturalized, but to that of the mind that thinks and constructs the fact. Let us raise up the debased countenances of the calumniated "brute facts," and we shall see the light of thought resplendent upon their foreheads. And that true point of departure will reveal itself not merely as a point of departure, but both as a point of arrival and of departure, not as the first step in historical construction, but the whole of history in its construction, which is also its self-construction. Historical determinism, and all the more "philosophy of history," leave the *reality of history* behind them, though they directed their journey thither, a journey which became so erratic and so full of useless repetitions.

We shall make the ingenuous Taine confess that what we are saying is the truth when we ask him what he means by the *collection des faits* and learn from him in reply that the collection in question consists of two stages or moments, in the first of which documents are revived in order to attain, "across the span of time, man, living and acting, endowed with passion and armed with habits, with voice and face, gestures and clothing, as distinct and complete as the man we've just left in the street"; and in the second is sought and found "beneath the exterior man, the interior man, 'the invisible man,' 'the core,' 'the group of faculties and emotions which produces the rest,' 'the interior drama,' 'psychology'." Something very different, then, from *collections de faits*! If the things mentioned by our author really do come to pass, if we really do make live again in imagination individuals and events, and if we think what is within them—that is to say, if we think the synthesis of intuition and concept, which is thought in its concreteness—history is already achieved: what more is wanted? There is nothing more to seek. Taine replies: "We must seek causes." That is to say, we must slay the living "fact" thought by thought, separate its abstract elements—a useful thing, no doubt, but useful for memory and practice. Or, as is the custom of Taine, we must misunderstand and exaggerate the value of the function of this abstract analysis, to lose ourselves in the mythology of races and ages, or in other different but none the less similar things. Let us beware how we slay poor facts, if we wish to think as historians, and in so far as we are such and really think in that way we shall not feel the necessity for having recourse either to the extrinsic bond of causes, historical determinism, or to that which is equally extrinsic of transcendental ends, philosophy of history. The fact historically thought has no cause and no end outside itself, but only in itself, coincident with its real qualities and with its qualitative reality. Because (it is well to note in passing) the determination of facts as *real* facts indeed, but of *unknown nature*, asserted but not understood, is itself also an illusion of naturalism (which thus heralds its other illusion, that of the "philosophy of history"). In thought, reality and quality,

existence and essence, are all one, and it is not possible to affirm a fact as real without at the same time knowing what fact it is—that is, without qualifying it.

## MANNHEIM (1893-1947)

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KARL MANNHEIM lectured in sociology in Germany until 1933. After the Nazis came to power he went to England, where he taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science until his death in 1947. He was the author of a number of volumes on problems in sociological theory: *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* and *Ideology and Utopia* (originally published in German in 1929) are amongst the best known.

The extracts from *Ideology and Utopia* which follow are concerned with aspects of what Mannheim called "the sociology of knowledge." This is a theory which claims that in many areas of inquiry, and particularly in those dealing with social or historical developments, the "perspective" or point of view of the inquirer is intimately connected with the nature and validity of the results at which he arrives. Our assessment of what a particular historian or social scientist (for example) tells us should take into account such factors as the socially conditioned character of his outlook and of the assumptions which govern his approach to his work. Mannheim believed that this raises problems concerning the degree of "objectivity" which can properly be attributed to any piece of investigation; every finding or conclusion, every claim to knowledge of some particular matter of fact, is to some extent necessarily infected with preconceptions deriving from the cultural environment of the "knower." In his view the solution to such problems partly lay in the frank recognition of these factors and in the acceptance of a "relational" criterion of objectivity, according to which divergences between the results obtained by inquirers whose "perspectives" are different can be allowed for and explained.

Mannheim has been justly criticized on a number of grounds.\* It is certainly true that his style is clumsy and repetitive and his language imprecise; he tends to lean heavily in his arguments upon inappropriate analogies,

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\* See, for example, E. Nagel, "Some Issues in the Logic of Historical Analysis," pp. 379 ff. of this volume. Other discussions of Mannheim's ideas are to be found in K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, ch. 23, and in M. Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, ch. 2.

particularly perceptual ones; and he shows a very confused understanding of concepts like *knowledge* and *objectivity*, which, though he uses them freely, are never subjected to a sufficiently careful scrutiny or examination. Nevertheless, his theory of "situational determination" is not without a certain interest. Historically, it is linked—as he himself points out—with Marx's doctrines concerning the real basis of ideologies, and with suggestions stemming from Hegel. Moreover, it does serve to make explicit the relativistic consequences for knowledge of human affairs often believed to follow from recognition of the profound contrasts in forms of life and thinking displayed by different historical periods and cultural milieus.

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## The Sociology of Knowledge\*

*The Essential Penetration of the Social Process into the "Perspective" of Thought.* Are the existential factors in the social process merely of peripheral significance, are they to be regarded merely as conditioning the origin or factual development of ideas (i.e. are they of merely genetic relevance), or do they penetrate into the "perspective" of concrete particular assertions? This is the next question we shall try to answer. The historical and social genesis of an idea would only be irrelevant to its ultimate validity if the temporal and social conditions of its emergence had no effect on its content and form. If this were the case, any two periods in the history of human knowledge would only be distinguished from one another by the fact that in the earlier period certain things were still unknown and certain errors still existed which, through later knowledge were completely corrected. This simple relationship between an earlier incomplete and a later complete period of knowledge may to a large extent be appropriate for the exact sciences (although indeed to-day the notion of the stability of the categorical structure of the exact sciences is, compared with the logic of classical physics, considerably shaken). For the history of the cultural sciences, however, the earlier stages are not quite so simply superseded by the later stages, and it is not so easily demonstrable that early errors have subsequently been corrected. Every epoch has its fundamentally new approach and its characteristic point of view, and consequently sees the "same" object from a new perspective.

Hence the thesis that the historico-social process is of essential significance for most of the domains of knowledge receives support from the fact

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\*This selection is from *Ideology and Utopia*, copyright by Harcourt, Brace & Co., and Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. It is reprinted by permission of the publishers.

that we can see from most of the concrete assertions of human beings when and where they arose, when and where they were formulated. The history of art has fairly conclusively shown that art forms may be definitely dated according to their style, since each form is possible only under given historical conditions and reveals the characteristics of that epoch. What is true of art also holds *mutatis mutandis* good for knowledge. Just as in art we can date particular forms on the ground of their definite association with a particular period of history so in the case of knowledge we can detect with increasing exactness the perspective due to a particular historical setting. Further, by the use of pure analysis of thought-structure, we can determine when and where the world presented itself in such, and only in such a light to the subject that made the assertion, and the analysis may frequently be carried to the point where the more inclusive question may be answered, *why* the world presented itself in precisely such a manner.

Whereas the assertion (to cite the simplest case) that twice two equals four gives no clue as to when, where, and by whom it was formulated, it is always possible in the case of a work in the social sciences to say whether it was inspired by the "historical school," or "positivism," or "Marxism," and from what stage in the development of each of these it dates. In assertions of this sort, we may speak of an "infiltration of the social position" of the investigator into the results of his study and of the "situational-relativity" ("*Situations-gebundenheit*"), or the relationship of these assertions to the underlying reality.

"Perspective" in this sense signifies the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in his thinking. Perspective, therefore, is something more than a merely formal determination of thinking. It refers also to qualitative elements in the structure of thought, elements which must necessarily be overlooked by a purely formal logic. It is precisely these factors which are responsible for the fact that two persons, even if they apply the same formal-logical rules, e.g. the law of contradiction or the formula of the syllogism, in an identical manner, may judge the same object very differently. . . .

*The Discovery of the Activistic Element in Knowledge.* That in the "idealistic" conception of knowledge knowing is regarded mostly as a purely "theoretical" act in the sense of pure perception, has its origins, in addition to the above-mentioned orientation toward mathematical models, in the fact that in the background of this epistemology there lies the philosophical ideal of the "contemplative life." We cannot concern ourselves here with the history of this ideal or the manner in which the purely contemplative conception of knowledge first penetrated into epistemology. (This would require examination of the pre-history of scientific logic and of the development of the philosopher from the seer, from whom the former took over the ideal of the "mystic vision.") It suffices for us to point out that this great esteem for the contemplatively perceived is not the outcome of the "pure" observation of the act of thinking and knowing, but springs from a hierarchy of values based on a certain philosophy of life. The idealistic philosophy, which represents this tradition, insisted that knowledge was pure only when

it was purely theoretical. Idealistic philosophy was not upset by the discovery that the type of knowledge represented by pure theory was only a small segment of human knowledge, that in addition there can be knowledge where men, while thinking, are also acting, and finally, that in certain fields knowledge arises only when and in so far as it itself is action, i.e. when action is permeated by the intention of the mind, in the sense that the concepts and the total apparatus of thought are dominated by and reflect this activist orientation. Not purpose in *addition* to perception but purpose in perception itself reveals the qualitative richness of the world in certain fields. Also the phenomenologically demonstrable fact that in these fields the activist genesis penetrates into the structure of the perspective and is not separable from it could not deter the older noology and epistemology either from overlooking this type of knowledge, which is integrated with action, or from seeing in it only an "impure" form of knowledge. (It is interesting to note that the connotations of the designation "impure knowledge" seems to point to a magical origin of the term.) The problem henceforth consists not in rejecting this type of knowledge from the very beginning, but in considering the manner in which the concept of knowing must be reformulated so that knowledge can be had even where purposeful action is involved. This reformulation of the noological problem is not intended to open the gates to propaganda and value-judgments in the sciences. On the contrary, when we speak of the fundamental intent of the mind (*intentio animi*) which is inherent in every form of knowledge and which affects the perspective, we refer to the irreducible residuum of the purposeful element in knowledge which remains even when all conscious and explicit evaluations and biases have been eliminated. It is self-evident that science (in so far as it is free from evaluation) is not a propagandistic device and does not exist for the purpose of communicating evaluations, but rather for the determination of facts. What the sociology of knowledge seeks to reveal is merely that, after knowledge has been freed from the elements of propaganda and evaluation, it still contains an activist element which, for the most part, has not become explicit, and which cannot be eliminated, but which, at best, can and should be raised into the sphere of the controllable.

*The Essentially Perspectivistic Element in Certain Types of Knowledge.* The second point of which we must take cognizance is that in certain areas of historical-social knowledge it should be regarded as right and inevitable that a given finding should contain the traces of the position of the knower. The problem lies not in trying to hide these perspectives or in apologizing for them, but in inquiring into the question of how, granted these perspectives, knowledge and objectivity are still possible. It is not a source of error that in the visual picture of an object in space we can, in the nature of the case, get only a perspectivistic view. The problem is not how we might arrive at a non-perspectivistic picture but how, by juxtaposing the various points of view, each perspective may be recognized as such and thereby a new level of objectivity attained. Thus we come to the point where the false ideal of a detached, impersonal point of view must be replaced by the ideal of an

essentially human point of view which is within the limits of a human perspective, constantly striving to enlarge itself.

*The Problem of the Sphere of Truth as Such.* In examining the philosophy of life, which furnishes the background for the idealistic epistemology and noology, it became clear that the ideal of a realm of truth as such (which, so to speak, pre-exists independently of the historical-psychological act of thought, and in which every concrete act of knowing merely participates) is the last offshoot of the dualistic world-view which, alongside of our world of concrete immediate events, created a second world by adding another dimension of being.

The positing of a sphere of truth which is valid in itself (an offshoot of the doctrine of ideas) is intended to do the same for the act of knowing as the notion of the beyond or the transcendental did for dualistic metaphysics in the realm of ontology, namely to postulate a sphere of perfection which does not bear the scars of its origins and, measured by which, all events and processes are shown to be finite and incomplete. Furthermore, just as in this extreme spiritualistic metaphysics the quality of "being human" was conceived as "merely being human"—which had been stripped of everything vital, corporeal, historical, or social—so an attempt was made to set forth a conception of knowledge in which these human elements would be submerged. It is necessary to raise the question time and again whether we can imagine the concept of knowing without taking account of the whole complex of traits by which man is characterized, and how, without these presuppositions we can even think of the concept of knowing, to say nothing of actually engaging in the act of knowing.

In the realm of ontology, in modern times, this dualistic view (which originated for the purpose of proving the inadequacy of "this" world) was, furthermore, gradually broken down in the course of empirical research. In noology and epistemology, however, it is still a force. But since here the basic presuppositions in the field of the theory of science are not quite so transparent, it was believed that this ideal of a superhuman, supertemporal sphere of validity was not a possible construction arising out of one's world-view, but an essential datum and prerequisite for the interpretation of the phenomenon of "thinking." Our discussion here is intended to show that from the point of view of the phenomenology of thought, there is no necessity to regard knowledge as though it were an intrusion from the sphere of actual happening into a sphere of "truth in itself." Such a construction at best is of a heuristic value for such modes of thought as are represented by the example  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . Our reflections aim, on the contrary, to show that the problem of knowing becomes more intelligible if we hold strictly to the data presented by the real factual thinking that we carry on in this world (which is the only kind of thinking known to us, and which is independent of this ideal sphere) and if we accept the phenomenon of knowing as the act of a living being. In other words, the sociology of knowledge regards the cognitive act in connection with the models to which it aspires in its existential as well as its meaningful quality, not as insight into "eternal" truths, arising from a purely theoretical, contemplative urge, or as some

sort of participation in these truths (as Scheler still thought), but as an instrument for dealing with life-situations at the disposal of a certain kind of vital being under certain conditions of life. All these three factors, the nature and structure of the process of dealing with life-situations, the subjects' own make-up (in his biological as well as historical-social aspects), and the peculiarity of the conditions of life, especially the place and position of the thinker—all these influence the results of thought. But they also condition the ideal of truth which this living being is able to construct from the products of thought.

The conception of knowledge as an intellectual act, which is only then complete when it no longer bears the traces of its human derivation, has, as we have already indicated, its greatest heuristic value in those realms where, as in the example  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , the above-mentioned characteristics can phenomenologically, with greater or less justification, be shown actually to exist. It is misleading, however, and tends to obscure fundamental phenomena in those broader realms of the knowable where, if the human historical element is overlooked, the results of thought are completely denatured.

Only the phenomenological evidence derived from the existing models of thought may be used as an argument for or against certain concepts involved in knowledge. Disguised motives, arising out of a certain outlook on the world, have no bearing on the matter. There is no reason for retaining in our noology the disdain for corporeal, sensual, temporal, dynamic, and social things characteristic of the type of human being presupposed in the "idealistic" philosophy. At the present moment there are confronting each other two types of knowledge which are of representative significance, and correspondingly there are two possibilities of noological and epistemological explanations of knowledge. For the moment it would be well to keep these two approaches separate and to make the differences between them stand out rather than to minimize them. Only in the process of trial and error will it become clear which of these bases of interpretation is the more sound and whether we get farther if, as has been done hitherto, we take the situationally detached type of knowledge as our point of departure and treat the situationally conditioned as secondary and unimportant or contrariwise, whether we regard the situationally detached type of knowledge as a marginal and special case of the situationally conditioned.

If we were to inquire into the possible directions of epistemology if it followed the last-mentioned model of thought and recognized the inherent "situational determination" of certain types of knowledge and made it the basis for its further reflections, we should be confronted with two possible alternatives. The scientist, in this case has the task, first of all, of making explicit the possibilities of the further implications of his problem and to point out all the eventualities that are likely to come into his range of vision. He should content himself with asserting only what, in his present stage of penetration into the problem, he can honestly determine. The function of the thinker is not to pronounce judgment at any cost when a new problem first arises, but rather, in full awareness of the fact that research is still

under way, to state only that which has become definitely perceivable. There are two alternatives that he may follow once he has arrived at this stage.

*The Two Directions in Epistemology.* One of the two directions taken by epistemology emphasizes the prevalence of situational determination, maintaining that in the course of the progress of social knowledge this element is ineradicable, and that, therefore, even one's own point of view may always be expected to be peculiar to one's position. This would require revision of the theoretical basis of knowledge by setting up the thesis of the inherently relational structure of human knowledge (just as the essentially perspectivist nature of visually perceived objects is admitted without question).

This solution does not imply renunciation of the postulate of objectivity and the possibility of arriving at decisions in factual disputes; nor does it involve an acceptance of illusionism according to which everything is in appearance and nothing can be decided. It does imply rather that this objectivity and this competence to arrive at decisions can be attained only through indirect means. It is not intended to assert that objects do not exist or that reliance upon observation is useless and futile but rather that the answers we get to the questions we put to the subject matter are, in certain cases, in the nature of things, possible only within the limits of the observer's perspective. The result even here is not relativism in the sense of one assertion being as good as another. Relationism, as we use it, states that every assertion can only be relationally formulated. It becomes relativism only when it is linked with the older static ideal of eternal, unperspectivist truths independent of the subjective experience of the observer, and when it is judged by this alien ideal of absolute truth.

In the case of situationally conditioned thought, objectivity comes to mean something quite new and different: (a) there is first of all the fact that in so far as different observers are immersed in the same system, they will, on the basis of the identity of their conceptual and categorical apparatus and through the common universe of discourse thereby created, arrive at similar results, and be in a position to eradicate as an error everything that deviates from this unanimity; (b) and recently there is a recognition of the fact that when observers have different perspectives, "objectivity" is attainable only in a more roundabout fashion. In such a case, what has been correctly but differently perceived by the two perspectives must be understood in the light of the differences in structure of these varied modes of perception. An effort must be made to find a formula for translating the results of one into those of the other and to discover a common denominator for these varying perspectivist insights. Once such a common denominator has been found, it is possible to separate the necessary differences of the two views from the arbitrarily conceived and mistaken elements, which here too should be considered as errors.

The controversy concerning visually perceived objects (which, in the nature of the case, can be viewed only in perspective) is not settled by setting up a non-perspectivist view (which is impossible). It is settled rather by understanding, in the light of one's own positionally determined



vision, why the object appeared differently to one in a different position. Likewise, in our field also, objectivity is brought about by the translation of one perspective into the terms of another. It is natural that here we must ask which of the various points of view is the best. And for this too there is a criterion. As in the case of visual perspective, where certain positions have the advantage of revealing the decisive features of the object, so here pre-eminence is given to that perspective which gives evidence of the greatest comprehensiveness and the greatest fruitfulness in dealing with empirical materials.

The theory of knowledge can also pursue a second course by emphasizing the following facts: The impetus to research in the sociology of knowledge may be so guided that it will not absolutize the concept of "situational determination"; rather, it may be directed in such a fashion that precisely by discovering the element of situational determination in the views at hand, a first step will be taken towards the solution of the problem of situational determination itself. As soon as I identify a view which sets itself up as absolute, as representing merely a given angle of vision, I neutralize its partial nature in a certain sense. Most of our earlier discussion of this problem moved quite spontaneously in the direction of the neutralization of situational determination by attempting to rise above it. The idea of the continuously broadening basis of knowledge, the idea of the continuous extension of the self and of the integration of various social vantage points into the process of knowledge—observations which are all based on empirical facts—and the idea of an all-embracing ontology which is to be sought for—all move in this direction. This tendency in intellectual and social history is closely connected with the processes of group contact and interpenetration. In its first stage, this tendency neutralizes the various conflicting points of view (i.e. deprives them of their absolute character); in its second stage, it creates out of this neutralization a more comprehensive and serviceable basis of vision. It is interesting to note that the construction of a broader base is bound up with a higher degree of abstractness and tends in an increasing degree to formalize the phenomena with which we are concerned. This formalizing tendency consists in relegating to a subordinate position the analysis of the concrete qualitative assertions which lead in a given direction, and substituting in place of the qualitative and configurative description of phenomena a purely functional view modelled after a purely mechanical pattern. This theory of increasing abstractness will be designated as the theory of the social genesis of abstraction. According to this sociological derivation of abstraction (which is clearly observable in the emergence of the sociological point of view itself), the trend towards a higher stage of abstraction is a correlate of the amalgamation of social groups. The corroboration of this contention is found in the fact that the capacity for abstraction among individuals and groups grows in the measure that they are parts of heterogeneous groups and organizations in more inclusive collective units, capable of absorbing local or otherwise particular groups. But this tendency towards abstraction on a higher level is still in accord with the theory of the situational determination of thought,

for the reason that the subject that engages in this thinking is by no means an absolutely autonomous "mind in itself," but is rather a subject which is ever more inclusive, and which neutralizes the earlier particular and concrete points of view.

## COLLINGWOOD (1889-1943)

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"THE CHIEF BUSINESS of twentieth-century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth-century history." This remark from Collingwood's *Autobiography* expresses clearly the dominating idea that governed the greater part of his thought and writing. Robin George Collingwood spent most of his life in Oxford; he was for several years a Fellow of Pembroke College and in 1935 became Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy. He was not, however, in sympathy with the prevailing philosophical climate, as he made amply clear in various of his writings. His sympathies lay rather with the earlier "idealist" school, represented by Green and Bradley, and he found that he had little in common with men like Cook Wilson and Prichard. In his view, their assumption that knowledge can be represented as being essentially a relation between the mind and things external to the mind was a mistake. Further, while they were apparently prepared to treat scientific inquiry as a fruitful field for philosophical investigation, they seemed to Collingwood to neglect the claims of history—another error. For he believed that this neglect led, in the first place, to misconceptions about the nature of the questions philosophers have discussed in the past; the problem of the character and function of metaphysical theories, for example, cannot be intelligently considered in abstraction from the historical context in which such theories originated. Again, the historical studies had made such strides since the middle of the nineteenth century that the need for a philosophical examination of the principles and concepts they employed could no longer reasonably be ignored.

Collingwood's name is often linked with that of Croce, and it is certainly true that many of Croce's ideas on history appear in Collingwood's books, expressed in a less mystical and more understandable form. But there are similarities of a broader kind. Like Croce, Collingwood concerned himself with subjects which have lain off the main track of philosophical inquiry during the twentieth century—in *The Principles of Art*, for example, he tried to come to grips with the problems raised by aesthetic experience

and judgment. He also resembled Croce in that his interests were not confined to theoretical matters; he was a practicing historian and archaeologist\*—a fact which explains his sharp awareness of characteristic features of historical method and explanation. It is these that are discussed in *The Idea of History*, which was published posthumously in 1946.

Central to the book is the contention that history is an autonomous discipline, with its own procedures and categories, the historian's knowledge and understanding of his material being of a unique character. Thus Collingwood rejects in their entirety all those beliefs that were, in his opinion, the legacy of nineteenth-century positivism—the view that the historian's role was comparable with the role of the natural scientist, and the suggestion that historical events may properly be subsumed under universal laws which implied (Collingwood thought) that historical persons and actions could be approached "externally" like the phenomena of nature. For this reason the systems of Spengler and Toynbec were as unacceptable in his eyes as those of Comte and Marx, whatever differences in detail there might be between them: all such projects were infected with "naturalism," with the mistaken prejudice that the only true knowledge is scientific knowledge, the only true forms of explanation those which exhibit particular occurrences as instances of laws.

Collingwood drew his own picture of the historian's activity. He replaced the "positivist" notion of history with one which treats *thought* as the fundamental concept of historical inquiry. To grasp the real nature of particular historical happenings it is necessary to penetrate to the "inside" of the events and to discern the thoughts of the historical agents concerned. The historian has to rethink these thoughts in his own mind, and this involves reconstructing for himself the situation in which the agents were placed and the way in which they envisaged it. Such a conception is one for which the observational and experimental sciences have no use, and it follows, Collingwood believed, that questions of the form, "Why did X occur?" have a radically different force when asked in the context of the natural sciences from the force they have when asked by an historian. It is therefore (according to Collingwood) impossible to assimilate history to branches of inquiry the aims and subject matter of which are altogether dissimilar: in his words, it is time that it was released from its "state of pupillage to natural science."

Collingwood's views have been the subject of a certain amount of philosophical controversy in recent years. Criticism has chiefly been directed against his theory of historical knowledge as suggesting that the historian has some sort of direct or "intuitive" access to the mental workings of the people whose actions he tries to understand and explain. It has been pointed out that, although the historian may imaginatively put himself in the place of a historical character whose actions he is trying to understand and may thus hope to form a likely hypothesis concerning the reasons for those actions, any hypothesis at which he arrives will still have to be confirmed by

\*See, for example, his *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford, 1936), written in collaboration with J. L. N. Myres.

appealing to evidence and by making acceptable inferences. Without such substantiation the claim that the hypothesis represents a "revival" of a piece of past thinking will be unjustified. At best, imaginative reconstruction represents a stage on the way to discovery, no more. Defenders of Collingwood, on the other hand, while not disputing this point, have argued that it does not invalidate what Collingwood was trying to say. This is so because, in the passages in which he discusses the problem of rethinking past thoughts, he was not attempting to describe how historical conclusions are (or should be) arrived at and established, but was rather attempting to elucidate what is logically involved in, and presupposed by, the concepts of *historical knowledge* and *understanding*: Collingwood, they suggest, was chiefly concerned to emphasize the conditions which must be satisfied for historical knowledge to be possible, and, if (as he believed) history is essentially knowledge of past thinking, this requires an investigation of what is implicit in the notion of knowing somebody else's thoughts. They argue that it is in the context of such a conceptual inquiry that his references to rethinking and re-enactment must be understood, and not as part of a methodological thesis according to which the historian is accredited with strange cognitive powers.<sup>†</sup>

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## History as Re-enactment of Past Experience\*

*The Distinction between History and Natural Science.* The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar's defiance of Republican law, or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins. The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (where by a mere event I mean one which has only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event. He is interested in the crossing of the Rubicon only in its relation to Republican

<sup>†</sup> See, e.g., Alan Donagan, "The Verification of Historical Theses," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 1956.

\* All selections in this chapter are from Collingwood's *The Idea of History*, copyright 1946 by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, by whose permission they are here reprinted.

law, and in the spilling of Caesar's blood only in its relation to a constitutional conflict. His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent.

In the case of nature, this distinction between the outside and the inside of an event does not arise. The events of nature are mere events, not the acts of agents whose thought the scientist endeavours to trace. It is true that the scientist, like the historian, has to go beyond the mere discovery of events; but the direction in which he moves is very different. Instead of conceiving the event as an action and attempting to rediscover the thought of its agent, penetrating from the outside of the event to its inside, the scientist goes beyond the event, observes its relation to others, and thus brings it under a general formula or law of nature. To the scientist, nature is always and merely a "phenomenon," not in the sense of being defective in reality, but in the sense of being a spectacle presented to his intelligent observation; whereas the events of history are never mere phenomena, never mere spectacles for contemplation, but things which the historian looks, not at, but through, to discern the thought within them.

In thus penetrating to the inside of events and detecting the thought which they express, the historian is doing something which the scientist need not and cannot do. In this way the task of the historian is more complex than that of the scientist. In another way it is simpler: the historian need not and cannot (without ceasing to be an historian) emulate the scientist in searching for the causes or laws of events. For science, the event is discovered by perceiving it, and the further search for its cause is conducted by assigning it to its class and determining the relation between that class and others. For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it. To discover that thought is already to understand it. After the historian has ascertained the facts, there is no further process of inquiring into their causes. When he knows what happened, he already knows why it happened.

This does not mean that words like "cause" are necessarily out of place in reference to history; it only means that they are used there in a special sense. When a scientist asks "Why did that piece of litmus paper turn pink?" he means "On what kinds of occasions do pieces of litmus paper turn pink?" When an historian asks "Why did Brutus stab Caesar?" he means "What did Brutus think, which made him decide to stab Caesar?" The cause of the event, for him, means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is the inside of the event itself.

The processes of nature can therefore be properly described as sequences of mere events, but those of history cannot. They are not processes of mere events but processes of actions, which have an inner side, consisting of processes of thought; and what the historian is looking for is these processes of thought. All history is the history of thought.

But how does the historian discern the thoughts which he is trying to

discover? There is only one way in which it can be done: by re-thinking them in his own mind. The historian of philosophy, reading Plato, is trying to know what Plato thought when he expressed himself in certain words. The only way in which he can do this is by thinking it for himself. This, in fact, is what we mean when we speak of 'understanding' the words. So the historian of politics or warfare, presented with an account of certain actions done by Julius Caesar, tries to understand these actions, that is, to discover what thoughts in Caesar's mind determined him to do them. This implies envisaging for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it. The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind.

This re-enactment is only accomplished, in the case of Plato and Caesar respectively, so far as the historian brings to bear on the problem all the powers of his own mind and all his knowledge of philosophy and politics. It is not a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind; it is a labor of active and therefore critical thinking. The historian not only re-enacts past thought, he re-enacts it in the context of his own knowledge and therefore, in re-enacting it, criticizes it, forms his own judgment of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it. This criticism of the thought whose history he traces is not something secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself. Nothing could be a completer error concerning the history of thought than to suppose that the historian as such merely ascertains "what so-and-so thought," leaving it to some one else to decide "whether it was true." All thinking is critical thinking; the thought which re-enacts past thoughts, therefore, criticizes them in re-enacting them.

It is now clear why historians habitually restrict the field of historical knowledge to human affairs. A natural process is a process of events, an historical process is a process of thoughts. Man is regarded as the only subject of historical process, because man is regarded as the only animal that thinks, or thinks enough, and clearly enough, to render his actions the expressions of his thoughts. The belief that man is the only animal that thinks at all is no doubt a superstition; but the belief that man thinks more, and more continuously and effectively, than any other animal, and is the only animal whose conduct is to any great extent determined by thought instead of by mere impulse and appetite, is probably well enough founded to justify the historian's rule of thumb.

It does not follow that all human actions are subject-matter for history; and indeed historians are agreed that they are not. But when they are asked how the distinction is to be made between historical and non-historical human actions, they are somewhat at a loss how to reply. From our present point of view we can offer an answer: so far as man's conduct is determined by what may be called his animal nature, his impulses and appetites, it is non-historical; the process of those activities is a natural process. Thus, the historian is not interested in the fact that men eat and sleep and make love and thus satisfy their natural appetites; but he is interested in the social

customs which they create by their thought as a framework within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality.

Consequently, although the conception of evolution has revolutionized our idea of nature by substituting for the old conception of natural process as a change within the limits of a fixed system of specific forms the new conception of that process as involving a change in these forms themselves, it has by no means identified the idea of natural process with that of historical process; and the fashion, current not long ago, of using the word "evolution" in an historical context, and talking of the evolution of parliament or the like, though natural in an age when the science of nature was regarded as the only true form of knowledge, and when other forms of knowledge, in order to justify their existence, felt bound to assimilate themselves to that model, was the result of confused thinking and a source of further confusions.

There is only one hypothesis on which natural processes could be regarded as ultimately historical in character: namely, that these processes are in reality processes of action determined by a thought which is their own inner side. This would imply that natural events are expressions of thoughts, whether the thoughts of God, or of angelic or demonic finite intelligences, or of minds somewhat like our own inhabiting the organic and inorganic bodies of nature as our minds inhabit our bodies. Setting aside mere flights of metaphysical fancy, such an hypothesis could claim our serious attention only if it led to a better understanding of the natural world. In fact, however, the scientist can reasonably say of it "*je n'ai pas eu besoin de cette hypothèse*," and the theologian will recoil from any suggestion that God's action in the natural world resembles the action of a finite human mind under the conditions of historical life. This at least is certain: that, so far as our scientific and historical knowledge goes, the processes of events which constitute the world of nature are altogether different in kind from the processes of thought which constitute the world of history....

*Historical Understanding.* How, or on what conditions, can the historian know the past? In considering this question, the first point to notice is that the past is never a given fact which he can apprehend empirically by perception. *Ex hypothesi*, the historian is not an eyewitness of the facts he desires to know. Nor does the historian fancy that he is; he knows quite well that his only possible knowledge of the past is mediate or inferential or indirect, never empirical. The second point is that this mediation cannot be effected by testimony. The historian does not know the past by simply believing a witness who saw the events in question and has left his evidence on record. That kind of mediation would give at most not knowledge but belief, and very ill-founded and improbable belief. And the historian, once more, knows very well that this is not the way in which he proceeds, he is aware that what he does to his so-called authorities is not to believe them but to criticize them. If then the historian has no direct or empirical knowledge of his facts, and no transmitted or testimonial knowledge of them,

what kind of knowledge has he: in other words, what must the historian do in order that he may know them?

My historical review of the idea of history has resulted in the emergence of an answer to this question: namely, that the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind. What we must now do is to look more closely at this idea, and see what it means in itself and what further consequences it implies.

In a general way, the meaning of the conception is easily understood. When a man thinks historically, he has before him certain documents or relics of the past. His business is to discover what the past was which has left these relics behind it. For example, the relics are certain written words; and in that case he has to discover what the person who wrote those words meant by them. This means discovering the thought which he expressed by them. To discover what this thought was, the historian must think it again for himself.

Suppose, for example, he is reading the Theodosian Code, and has before him a certain edict of an emperor. Merely reading the words and being able to translate them does not amount to knowing their historical significance. In order to do that he must envisage the situation with which the emperor was trying to deal, and he must envisage it as that emperor envisaged it. Then he must see for himself, just as if the emperor's situation were his own, how such a situation might be dealt with; he must see the possible alternatives, and the reasons for choosing one rather than another; and thus he must go through the process which the emperor went through in deciding on this particular course. Thus he is re-enacting in his own mind the experience of the emperor; and only in so far as he does this has he any historical knowledge, as distinct from a merely philological knowledge, of the meaning of the edict.

Or again, suppose he is reading the passage of an ancient philosopher. Once more, he must know the language in a philological sense and be able to construe; but by doing that he has not yet understood the passage as an historian of philosophy must understand it. In order to do that, he must see what the philosophical problem was, of which his author is here stating his solution. He must think that problem out for himself, see what possible solutions of it might be offered, and see why this particular philosopher chose that solution instead of another. This means re-thinking for himself the thought of his author, and nothing short of that will make him the historian of that author's philosophy. . . .

[Collingwood goes on to consider at some length two kinds of objection which might be brought against the view that the historian can rethink past thoughts. Suppose it is maintained that rethinking such a thought involves one or other of two things: *either* "performing an act of thought resembling the first" *or* performing one "literally identical with the first." Both of these interpretations raise difficulties. On the former it follows that the historian will deal only with copies



of past thoughts and not with the past thoughts themselves; on the latter, that the historian can never rethink a past thought, since each act of thinking represents an individual experience, and no two experiences can be "literally identical." Collingwood tries to resolve the problem by arguing that an act of thought is not a mere experience in the way in which sensations and feelings are experiences; although "it occurs at a certain time, and in a certain context of other acts of thought, emotions, sensations and so forth," it has the characteristic of being able to "sustain itself through a change of context and revive in a different one."]

If I now re-think a thought of Plato's, is my act of thought identical with Plato's or different from it? Unless it is identical, my alleged knowledge of Plato's philosophy is sheer error. But unless it is different, my knowledge of Plato's philosophy implies oblivion of my own. What is required, if I am to know Plato's philosophy, is both to re-think it in my own mind and also to think other things in the light of which I can judge it. Some philosophers have attempted to solve this puzzle by a vague appeal to the "principle of identity in difference," arguing that there is a development of thought from Plato to myself and that anything which develops remains identical with itself although it becomes different. Others have replied with justice that the question is how exactly the two things are the same, and how exactly they differ. The answer is that, in their immediacy, as actual experiences organically united with the body of experience out of which they arise, Plato's thought and mine are different. But in their mediation they are the same. This perhaps calls for further explanation. When I read Plato's argument in the *Theaetetus* against the view that knowledge is merely sensation, I do not know what philosophical doctrines he was attacking; I could not expound these doctrines and say in detail who maintained them and by what arguments. In its immediacy, as an actual experience of his own, Plato's argument must undoubtedly have grown up out of a discussion of some sort, though I do not know what it was, and been closely connected with such a discussion. Yet if I not only read his argument but understand it, follow it in my own mind by re-arguing it with and for myself, the process of argument which I go through is not a process resembling Plato's, it actually is Plato's, so far as I understand him rightly. The argument simply as itself, starting from these premisses and leading through this process to this conclusion; the argument as it can be developed either in Plato's mind or mine or anyone else's, is what I call the thought in its mediation. In Plato's mind, this existed in a certain context of discussion and theory; in my mind, because I do not know that context, it exists in a different one, namely that of the discussions arising out of modern sensationalism. Because it is a thought and not a mere feeling or sensation, it can exist in both these contexts without losing its identity, although without some appropriate context it could never exist. Part of the context in which it exists in my mind might, if it was a fallacious argument, be other activities of thought consisting in knowing

how to refute it; but even if I refuted it, it would still be the same argument and the act of following its logical structure would be the same act.

*The Subject-Matter of History.* If we raise the question, Of what can there be historical knowledge? the answer is, Of that which can be re-enacted in the historian's mind. In the first place, this must be experience. Of that which is not experience but the mere object of experience, there can be no history. Thus there is and can be no history of nature, whether as perceived or as thought by the scientist. No doubt nature contains, undergoes, or even consists of, processes; its changes in time are essential to it, they may even (as some think) be all that it has or is; and these changes may be genuinely creative, no mere repetitions of fixed cyclical phases but the development of new orders of natural being. But all this goes no way towards proving that the life of nature is an historical life or that our knowledge of it is historical knowledge. The only condition on which there could be a history of nature is that the events of nature are actions on the part of some thinking being or beings, and that by studying these actions we could discover what were the thoughts which they expressed and think these thoughts for ourselves. This is a condition which probably no one will claim is fulfilled. Consequently the processes of nature are not historical processes and our knowledge of nature, though it may resemble history in certain superficial ways, e.g. by being chronological, is not historical knowledge.

Secondly, even experience is not as such the object of historical knowledge. In so far as it is merely immediate experience, a mere flow of consciousness consisting of sensations, feelings, and the like, its process is not an historical process. That process can, no doubt, be not only directly experienced in its immediacy, but also known; its particular details and its general characteristics can be studied by thought; but the thought which studies it finds in it a mere object of study, which in order to be studied need not be, and indeed cannot be, re-enacted in the thinking about it. In so far as we think about its particular details, we are remembering experiences of our own or entering with sympathy and imagination into those of others; but in such cases we do not re-enact the experiences which we remember or with which we sympathize; we are merely contemplating them as objects external to our present selves, aided perhaps by the presence in ourselves of other experiences like them. In so far as we think about its general characteristics, we are engaging in the science of psychology. In neither case are we thinking historically.

Thirdly, even thought itself, in its immediacy as the unique act of thought with its unique context in the life of an individual thinker, is not the object of historical knowledge. It cannot be re-enacted; if it could, time itself would be cancelled and the historian would be the person about whom he thinks, living over again in all respects the same. The historian cannot apprehend the individual act of thought in its individuality, just as it actually happened. What he apprehends of that individual is only something that it might have shared with other acts of thought and actually has shared with his own. But this something is not an abstraction, in the

sense of a common characteristic shared by different individuals and considered apart from the individuals that share it. It is the act of thought itself, in its survival and revival at different times and in different persons: once in the historian's own life, once in the life of the person whose history he is narrating.

Thus the vague phrase that history is knowledge of the individual claims for it a field at once too wide and too narrow: too wide, because the individuality of perceived objects and natural facts and immediate experiences falls outside its sphere, and most of all because even the individuality of historical events and personages, if that means their uniqueness, falls equally outside it; too narrow, because it would exclude universality, and it is just the universality of an event or character that makes it a proper and possible object of historical study, if by universality we mean something that oversteps the limits of merely local and temporal existence and possesses a significance valid for all men at all times. These too are no doubt vague phrases; but they are attempts to describe something real: namely the way in which thought, transcending its own immediacy, survives and revives in other contexts; and to express the truth that individual acts and persons appear in history not in virtue of their individuality as such, but because that individuality is the vehicle of a thought which, because it was actually theirs, is potentially everyone's.

Of everything other than thought, there can be no history. Thus a biography, for example, however much history it contains, is constructed on principles that are not only non-historical but anti-historical. Its limits are biological events, the birth and death of a human organism: its framework is thus a framework not of thought but of natural process. Through this framework—the bodily life of the man, with his childhood, maturity and senescence, his diseases and all the accidents of animal existence—the tides of thought, his own and other's, flow crosswise, regardless of its structure, like sea-water through a stranded wreck. Many human emotions are bound up with the spectacle of such bodily life in its vicissitudes, and biography, as a form of literature, feeds these emotions and may give them wholesome food; but this is not history. Again, the record of immediate experience with its flow of sensations and feelings, faithfully preserved in a diary or recalled in a memoir, is not history. At its best, it is poetry; at its worst, an obtrusive egotism; but history it can never be.

But there is another condition without which a thing cannot become the object of historical knowledge. The gulf of time between the historian and his object must be bridged, as I have said, from both ends. The object must be of such a kind that it can revive itself in the historian's mind; the historian's mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival. This does not mean that his mind must be of a certain kind, possessed of an historical temperament; nor that he must be trained in special rules of historical technique. It means that he must be the right man to study that object. What he is studying is a certain thought: to study it involves re-enacting it in himself; and in order that it may take its place in the immediacy of his own thought, his thought must be, as it were, pre-adapted

to become its host. This does not imply, in the technical sense of the phrase, a pre-established harmony between the historian's mind and its object; it is not, for example, an endorsement of Coleridge's saying that men are born Platonists or Aristotelians; for it has not prejudged the question whether a Platonist or an Aristotelian is born or made. A man who at one time of life finds certain historical studies unprofitable, because he cannot enter for himself into the thought of those about whom he is thinking, will find at another time that he has become able to do so, perhaps as a result of deliberate self-training. But at any given stage in his life the historian as he stands is certain to have, for whatever reason, a readier sympathy with some ways of thinking than with others. Partly this is because certain ways of thinking are altogether, or relatively, strange to him: partly it is because they are all too familiar, and he feels the need of getting away from them in the interests of his own mental and moral welfare.

If the historian, working against the grain of his own mind because it is demanded of him that he should study such uncongenial subjects, or because they are "in the period" which his own misguided conscience fancies he ought to treat in all its aspects, tries to master the history of a thought into which he cannot personally enter, instead of writing its history he will merely repeat the statements that record the external facts of its development: names and dates, and ready-made descriptive phrases. Such repetitions may very well be useful, but not because they are history. They are dry bones, which may some day become history, when someone is able to clothe them with the flesh and blood of a thought which is both his own and theirs. This is only a way of saying that the historian's thought must spring from the organic unity of his total experience, and be a function of his entire personality with its practical as well as its theoretical interests. It need hardly be added that since the historian is a son of his time, there is a general likelihood that what interests him will interests his contemporaries. It is a familiar fact that every generation finds itself interested in, and therefore able to study historically, tracts and aspects of the past which to its fathers were dry bones, signifying nothing.

Historical knowledge, then, has for its proper object thought: not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself. This principle has served us to distinguish history from natural science on the one hand, as the study of a given or objective world distinct from the act of thinking it, and on the other from psychology as the study of immediate experience, sensation, and feeling, which, though the activity of a mind, is not the activity of thinking. But the positive meaning of the principle needs further determination. How much or how little is meant to be included under the term "thought"? . . .

*Acts of Reflective Thought.* In order, therefore, that any particular act of thought should become subject-matter for history, it must be an act not only of thought but of reflective thought, that is, one which is performed in the consciousness that it is being performed, and is constituted what it is by that consciousness. The effort to do it must be more than a merely

conscious effort. It must not be the blind effort to do we know not what, like the effort to remember a forgotten name or to perceive a confused object; it must be a reflective effort, the effort to do something of which we have a coception before we do it. A reflective activity is one in which we know what it is that we are trying to do, so that when it is done we know that it is done by seeing that it has conformed to the standard or criterion which was our initial conception of it. It is therefore an act which we are enabled to perform by knowing in advance how to perform it.

Not all acts are of this kind. Samuel Butler was confusing the issue from one side when he said that an infant must know how to suck, or it could not do it; others have confused it from the opposite side by maintaining that we never know what we are going to do until we have done it. Butler was trying to make out that acts which are unreflective are really reflective, exaggerating the place of reason in life, in order to oppose a prevailing materialism; these others are contending that reflective acts are really unreflective, because they conceive all experience as immediate. In its immediacy, as a unique individual, complete with all details and in the full context in which alone it can immediately exist, our future act can certainly never be planned in advance; however carefully we have thought it out, it will always contain much that is unforeseen and surprising; but to infer that therefore it cannot be planned at all is to betray the assumption that its immediate being is the only being it has. An act is more than a mere unique individual; it is something having a universal character; and in the case of a reflective or deliberate act (an act which we not only do, but intend to do before doing it) this universal character is the plan or idea of the act which we conceive in our thought before doing the act itself, and the criterion by reference to which, when we have done it, we know that we have done what we meant to do.

There are certain kinds of act which cannot be done except on these terms: that is to say, cannot be done except reflectively, by a person who knows what he is trying to do and is therefore able, when he has done it, to judge his own action by reference to his intention. It is characteristic of these acts that they should be done, as we say, "on purpose": that there should be a basis of purpose upon which the structure of the act should be erected, and to which it must conform. Reflective acts may be roughly described as the acts which we do on purpose, and these are the only acts which can become the subject-matter of history. . . .

Now, it might be thought that all purposive action must be practical action, because there are two stages in it: first conceiving the purpose, which is a theoretical activity or act of pure thought, and then executing it, which is a practical activity supervening on the theoretical. On this analysis it would follow that acting, in the narrow or practical sense of the word, is the only thing that can be done on purpose. For, it might be argued, you cannot think on purpose, since if you conceived your own act of thought before executing it, you would have executed it already. The theoretical activities, it would follow, cannot be purposive: they must be,

as it were, done in the dark, with no conception of what is to come from engaging in them.

This is an error, but it is an error of some interest for the theory of history, because it has actually influenced the theory and practice of historiography to the extent of making people think that the only possible subject-matter of history is the practical life of men. The idea that history concerns itself, and can concern itself, only with such matters as politics, warfare, economic life, and, in general, the world of practice, is still widespread and was once almost universal. We have seen how even Hegel, who showed so brilliantly how the history of philosophy should be written, committed himself in his lectures on the philosophy of history to the view that history's proper subject-matter is society and the state, the practical life, or (in his own technical language) objective mind, mind as expressing itself outwardly in actions and institutions.

Today it is no longer necessary to argue that art, science, religion, philosophy, and so forth are proper subjects of historical study; the fact of their being studied historically is too familiar. But it is necessary to ask why this is so, in view of the argument to the contrary that has been stated above.

In the first place, it is not true that a person engaged in purely theoretical thinking is acting without a purpose. A man doing a certain piece of scientific work, such as inquiring into the cause of malaria, has a quite definite purpose in mind: to discover the cause of malaria. True, he does not know what this cause is; but he knows that when he finds it he will know that he has found it by applying to his discovery certain tests or criteria which he has before him from the start. The plan of his discovery, then, is the plan of a theory which will satisfy these criteria. Similarly for the historian or philosopher. He is never sailing an uncharted sea; his chart, however little detail it contains, is marked with the parallels of latitude and longitude, and his purpose is to discover what there is to put down on and between those lines. In other words: every actual inquiry starts from a certain problem, and the purpose of the inquiry is to solve that problem; the plan of the discovery, therefore, is already known and formulated by saying that, whatever the discovery may be, it must be such as to satisfy the terms of the problem. As in the case of practical activity, this plan of course changes as the activity of thought proceeds; some plans are abandoned as impracticable and replaced by others, some are carried out successfully and found to lead to new problems.

In the second place, the difference between conceiving and executing a purpose was not correctly described as the difference between a theoretical act and a practical one. To conceive a purpose or form an intention is already a practical activity. It is not thought forming an anteroom to action; it is action itself in its initial stage. If this is not at once recognized, it may be recognized by considering its implications. Thought, as theoretical activity, cannot be moral or immoral; it can only be true or false. That which is moral or immoral must be action. Now, if a man forms the intention

of committing murder or adultery, and then decides not to carry out his intention, the intention itself already exposes him to condemnation on moral grounds. It is not said of him "he accurately conceived the nature of murder or adultery, so his thought was true and therefore admirable"; it is said of him "he is doubtless not so wicked as if he had carried his intention out to the end; but to intend such action at all was wicked."

The scientist, the historian, and the philosopher are thus, no less than the practical man, proceeding in their activities according to plans, thinking on purpose, and thus arriving at results that can be judged according to criteria derived from the plans themselves. Consequently there can be histories of these things. All that is necessary is that there should be evidence of how such thinking has been done and that the historian should be able to interpret it, that is, should be able to re-enact in his own mind the thought he is studying, envisaging the problem from which it started and reconstructing the steps by which its solution was attempted. In practice, the common difficulty for the historian is to identify the problem, for whereas the thinker is generally careful to expound the steps of his own thought, he is talking, as a rule to contemporaries who already know what the problem is, and he may never state it at all. And unless the historian knows what the problem was at which he was working, he has no criterion by which to judge the success of his work. It is the historian's endeavor to discover this problem that gives importance to the study of "influences," which is so futile when influences are conceived as the decanting of ready-made thoughts out of one mind into another. An intelligent inquiry into the influence of Socrates on Plato, or Descartes on Newton, seeks to discover not the points of agreement, but the way in which the conclusions reached by one thinker give rise to the problems for the next.

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PART II

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RECENT VIEWS CONCERNING  
HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE  
AND EXPLANATION





PHILOSOPHIES of history of the speculative kind flourished during a period when philosophical activity still found its most striking mode of expression in the construction of elaborate metaphysical theories. A typical feature of such theories was the attempt to present the world as forming a unitary, connected system, the ultimate character of which could—it seemed frequently to be assumed—be arrived at by using purely *a priori* reasoning. In recent times, however, the nature and possibility of metaphysical thinking has been subjected to a radical reappraisal. It has been claimed, for example, that metaphysical statements and theories, while not being devoid of sense (as was argued in the early days of Logical Positivism), nevertheless cannot be regarded as giving information about the world in the way that empirical statements and theories do, and require careful analysis and interpretation if their significance and point is to be grasped. This critical approach reflects a considerable change in conceptions of the character of philosophical problems and of the types of investigation which it is open to a philosopher to undertake. In crude terms it involves the belief that philosophy is not a kind of very general science, capable of bringing to light truths about the fundamental structure of reality which are not discoverable by the ordinary methods of observation and experiment. Although philosophical problems are unlike questions which may arise in, say, chemistry or astronomy in that they cannot be decided by appealing to the ways in which observable phenomena behave under certain conditions, this does not require us to suppose that they represent problems about the character of the world which can be solved by purely analytic reasoning. What it does mean is that philosophical questions are radically dissimilar in nature to the problems that arise in the empirical sciences. They are rooted in issues and difficulties connected in essential ways with our forms of language and with the categories and concepts in terms of which we think and express ourselves.

In the light of this a distinction is sometimes drawn between questions asked within the field of a particular branch of inquiry and questions asked about the concepts and types of reasoning characteristically employed in that branch of inquiry. Thus it is one thing (for instance) to argue in favor of the acceptability of a particular hypothesis in physics or biology—to do this is to argue as a physicist or biologist: it is another to examine the form such arguments take, the sorts of consideration that are adduced in their support, the terms in which they are stated—matters that may be of philosophical interest and importance. The differences between the two have been blurred in the past owing to a tendency of philosophers to ask questions which purported to be factual questions similar to those asked by empirical investigators within their own fields, but which obstinately seemed to defy or elude solution by customary methods. When these questions were regarded as not being of this kind—when, for example, they were treated as arising from, or as reflecting, a concern with the use and function of various crucial notions, or with the relations between technical and non-technical discourse, or again, perhaps, with the advantages or disadvantages of a certain way of speaking, of

certain forms of description and interpretation—many of the issues traditionally raised and discussed in philosophy took on an altered aspect. It appeared that they might be susceptible to a fresh approach, an approach consisting, in part, in the analysis and elucidation of terms and expressions which, owing to their being unclear in themselves or else suggestive of misleading analogies, could be expected in certain contexts to give rise to various kinds of theoretical puzzlement or confusion.

In the field of history such changes in philosophical outlook have made themselves felt in two principal ways. The first concerns the attitude adopted towards attempts to present the course of history as conforming to an over-all pattern or scheme. It has been part of the aim of the first part of this book to show that such attempts have by no means conformed to a single type. Nevertheless, there are very few which do not at some point employ arguments that are, in their reliance upon some *a priori* insight into the nature of things, reminiscent of arguments to be found in avowedly metaphysical works. And even where (as with Comte) it is explicitly claimed that the hypotheses propounded have been formulated in accordance with rigorous standards of inductive reasoning, it is far from obvious that the claims reflect what has in fact been done. As a consequence of this, much criticism of a logical and methodological kind has recently been levelled against the ambitious theories of men like Comte, Marx, and Toynbee, of which perhaps the most comprehensive and persuasive example is to be found in the three articles by Professor K. R. Popper entitled "The Poverty of Historicism," originally published in the periodical *Economica* in 1944-45 and republished in book-form in 1957. It has been argued on a number of grounds, for example, that the "laws" which historical theorists have at various times claimed to have discovered are not properly characterized as laws at all, if the term "law" is to bear a sense remotely analogous to the meaning it has when used in the context of the natural sciences.

Projects which have been undertaken in the belief that they represent a genuine attempt to apply "scientific method" to sociological and historical phenomena exhibit, when analyzed, a curiously inaccurate idea of what constitutes such method: they often betray a naïve conception of what theories and hypotheses constructed by scientists working in different fields look like, of how they are established, and of the purposes they are intended to serve. According to critics like Popper, the belief that there exist certain "laws of historical development"—a belief axiomatic amongst many nineteenth-century "philosophers of history"—reflects confusions of this kind. Too often a statement asserting that the historical process obeys such-and-such a law seems on analysis to amount to no more than a statement claiming that up to the time of writing the historical process has exhibited a particular trend or direction. But, if so, it cannot properly be interpreted as a statement of law at all: it is, if anything, a particular statement of historical fact, and not a general statement specifying what can universally be expected to occur, given the satisfaction of certain conditions.

Again, it has been argued that, while general terms like "civilization," "culture," "class," "race," "productive forces," "national spirit" and so forth have played a central role in the development of speculative theories of history, they have at the same time been employed uncritically and without being assigned a clear and

unambiguous sense. In consequence, there has been a tendency to exploit the vagueness that surrounds them in unjustifiable ways; to treat them, for instance, as the names of autonomous agencies standing in some unexplained way behind the phenomena of history and producing or directing the flow of events. And even where hypostatization and personification of this kind have not taken place, the words in question have often been used so elastically as to make the "laws" formulated in terms of them void of empirical content.

Thus, however much philosophers of history may at various times have maintained that history conforms to a deterministic pattern in which all that has happened has been governed by rigid laws or impersonal forces, the arguments that have been used in support of these contentions no longer seem convincing. And a similar skepticism has been expressed towards the consequences often assumed to follow from the acceptance of such beliefs: the suggestion that human choice can have no real effect in deciding the course of events, and the view that, in any case, freedom of choice and the moral responsibility attributed to historical agents are themselves illusions—the decisions men take being finally determined by factors outside their control. For what, it has been asked, is really meant by these large and high-sounding claims, these generalities and metaphors of which such a liberal use has been made? And what connection do they have with the actual procedure of professional historians? What would happen to history as the subject is at present studied if historians were really to accept deterministic and fatalistic interpretations of human action and behavior of the sort described, even if it were granted that their meaning was plain? Is there not a case, in fact, for examining more carefully the ways in which practicing historians approach their subject, in an effort to unravel the implications of some of the key terms they use and to determine what is presupposed by their methods of description, classification and arrangement?

Recent writers have believed that there is. The last fifteen or twenty years has produced a good deal of work concerned with historical thinking, which has been carried out by philosophers familiar with analytical methods. It is their systematic employment of these methods, involving the exploration and elucidation of concepts and forms of argument, that chiefly distinguishes their contributions from those of previous philosophers who, working in the same field, had been bred in a different philosophical climate. It is true that for philosophers like Dilthey, Croce and Collingwood the important question was to discover what history essentially is, not to demonstrate how it might be transformed into something else. But, in the course of their attempts to show that it possesses features which are peculiar to it and which cannot be overridden or neglected in the name of some theoretical ideal of epistemological uniformity, they at times displayed a tendency to run together considerations of very different types in a way liable to lead to confusion. When Collingwood, for example, wrote that all history is the history of thought, it is not clear whether he was describing existing historical practice or whether he was making a procedural recommendation. The thesis concerning the reliving or re-experiencing of the thoughts and feelings of historical agents suffers, in the formulations often provided of it, from a similar lack of clarity: the question of giving an analysis of what is involved in the notion of understanding another person's behavior is not always distinguished from the different (although con-

nected) questions of providing an account of how understanding of this kind can best be achieved or of describing what it feels like to believe that one possesses such understanding. By thus failing sufficiently to separate logical from methodological and psychological inquiries, Croce—to take an instance—sometimes gives the impression (possibly not altogether intended) of supposing the validity of historical judgments to be certifiable subjectively; by an appeal, that is, to the historian's inner experience or "intuition." And such a criterion is open to obvious objections if history is to continue to be regarded as an "objective" study employing interpersonal methods of check and verification.

Contemporary writers have, in general, tried to avoid these difficulties by treating their inquiries as being primarily conceptual in character and by eschewing the use of a psychological or quasi-psychological vocabulary in the presentation of their conclusions. Again, they have tried—although this has not always proved easy—to distinguish questions of logical analysis from questions of evaluation and appraisal: examining, for example, the concepts historians habitually employ and the way they employ them is clearly different from asking whether these concepts are the best or most fruitful that could be used and whether historical terminology does not require an overhaul of some sort which might result in, for instance, greater precision. When their questions have been of the first (analytical) kind, modern writers have often been guided by the realization that certain general problems tend to recur in discussions about the nature of historical knowledge, such problems frequently being of a bewildering or skeptical nature: for example, "Is history a science?" "Can a historian ever claim to know what went on in the minds of those about whom he writes?" "Could there be such a thing as an unbiased or impartial historical account?" "How can historians claim to be able to explain the past when they are—on their own admission—unable to predict the future?" Questions like these have traditionally caused puzzlement amongst historians and non-historians alike partly because it has not appeared obvious what sort of considerations would be relevant to their solution. Failure to understand the nature and logic of some particular branch of study often expresses itself in the form of highly general questions of a skeptical or disconcerting character; and many philosophers have felt that a full investigation of such matters as what a historian means when he speaks of certain events "causing" or "contributing to" other events or what he implies when he criticizes a historical account or interpretation as being "inaccurate" or "biased" is necessary if problems like the ones mentioned are to be elucidated and rationally discussed.

Thus, to return to a topic which has already been briefly alluded to, what is sometimes called "the problem of historical objectivity" has engaged the attention of philosophers and historians (in their speculative moods) alike. It is, for example, quite often argued that the historian's vision of the past is necessarily impregnated with the outlook, the ideas and the prejudices of his particular "historico-cultural position." And if this is so, how can final truth ever be claimed for anything he may write? History, we are sometimes told, has to be rewritten for every generation; but is this not tantamount to admitting the irremediable "subjectivity" of all historical accounts—or, at least, to admitting that they have only relative validity? The inclination to ask skeptical questions of this sort is frequently to be found associated with deterministic beliefs regarding the nature of the historical process

and the necessary interdependence of different branches of social and cultural activity. Spengler is a case in point. Again, much Marxist or quasi-Marxist criticism implies a "relativistic" attitude, at any rate towards history written by bourgeois or non-Communist historians. Perhaps the most forthright proponent of historical relativism in recent times has been the sociologist, Karl Mannheim, according to whom, in certain areas of "historical-social knowledge," any given finding inevitably bears the imprint of the position and perspective of the knower. But other types of theory have also proved fertile in producing views like these. Some philosophical "idealists," for instance, with their insistence upon the role of the historian's present experience in his interpretation of past events, often appear to be advocating a similar position, although they express it in more ambiguous terms.

What renders many skeptical doctrines concerning the objectivity of history difficult to discuss and assess is the general and abstract manner in which they are often formulated, though this has also, no doubt, contributed towards making them seem compelling. For example, too little care is often taken in making essential distinctions. When it is asserted that historians belonging to different periods or cultural milieus necessarily interpret the past from different standpoints, is it implied that this affects the methods according to which they utilize and assess evidence, their basic procedures of criticism and substantiation? Or is something altogether vaguer and less specific being suggested—possibly, that the general sense of what is important and what is not important in human life and history varies inevitably from age to age, that systems of value change, that the focus of interest and attention shifts? Further, does it follow from the fact that an account may be given of how and why a particular historian reached certain historical conclusions that these conclusions can only be regarded as having "relative" truth—whatever that may be? Some writers appear to have thought so. And if all history is necessarily "slanted" or biased, with what type of study is it being contrasted? The article by Mr. Blake and the extract from Professor Berlin's Conte Memorial Lecture, which have been reprinted in this volume, are concerned with various features of this somewhat confusing subject where doubts, seemingly stilled, have a strange way of re-emerging in new forms.

It is, however, upon the concept of *explanation* that the attention of recent philosophers has chiefly been focussed. Here, more than anywhere else, a tension is liable to be felt between description and prescription, between giving an account and analysis of the ways in which historians provide explanations of events in the course of their work, and suggesting patterns or models which the philosopher, guided by considerations of a logical or methodological character, feels should represent the structure of any historical explanation worthy of the name. It is here, too, that the problem of relating history to other disciplines is apt to manifest itself most acutely, leading to questions about the comparative form and function of explanations in history and in the natural sciences, and to attempts, on the one hand, to show that there is no radical difference between explanations of the type historians provide and those characteristic of other kinds of inquiry, and, on the other, to argue that there is and that only distortion and misunderstanding can result from thinking otherwise. Professor C. G. Hempel's article, "The Function of General Laws in History," which has attained the status of a kind of classic

in the field, presents in a persuasive form the arguments for interpreting historical explanations as presupposing the existence of "universal hypotheses" or general laws upon which they are "based" in a manner analogous to the manner in which explanations in the natural sciences are—it is claimed—based upon general laws. One of the merits of Hempel's paper was that it formulated the problem of elucidating explanations in history in clear and intelligible terms, and in a way, moreover, that constituted a challenge. For it was left to subsequent philosophers to ask themselves how far in fact the Hempelian pattern is implicit in the explanations historians provide. And when they did so certain difficulties seemed to emerge.

It was not merely that historians themselves did not prove very enthusiastic when confronted with the proposed analysis of what they were doing. More immediate objections presented themselves. When, for example, an attempt was made to state the laws which, on such an interpretation, must be presupposed by any historical explanation, the resulting formulations showed a disturbing tendency either to be so vague and unspecific as to put in question their utility or else to be so highly determinate and particularized as to appear no longer to qualify as statements of law at all. Thus at a crucial spot the suggested analogy between historical and scientific explanation seemed to break down. Nor was this all. For it has been argued that in any case the attempt to present explanations, in history at least, as essentially having the function of exhibiting particular occurrences as instances of the operation of certain general laws represents a failure to recognize an important point; the point, namely, that it is part of the function of an explanation to make what is explained *intelligible*, this being rarely, if ever, achieved merely by showing that it is the sort of thing which can always be expected to happen under certain types of circumstance.\*

In the light of such objections philosophers seem to be confronted with the alternatives of either seeking to reformulate the "implicit law" type of analysis in a way that will render it immune to the criticisms commonly levelled against it or else of trying to dispense with it altogether on the grounds that it is inappropriate so far as history is concerned. The latter course, tempting though it is in some respects, is not free from difficulty. For if it is held that explanations which purport to identify the causal antecedents of historical events may be interpreted in a way that does not involve a reference to underlying laws or generalizations, the question arises as to how in the end such explanations are established or accepted as correct. A historian's account of how a certain event came about may be criticized on the grounds that the factors he refers to as explaining it are not such that they could legitimately be considered as capable of causing, or contributing to, the occurrence of the event to be explained. And it is hard to see how many judgments of this kind, involving estimates of causal relevance or irrelevance, can be understood in a way that does justice to their susceptibility to rational challenge and discussion without supposing them to be grounded or dependent upon general statements of some sort. On the other hand, it may be argued that, although this may be true of some historical judgments and explanations, it would be perilous to think that it was so of all: historians do not work to a single pattern, and the ways in which they may try to give an account of how or why something happened will vary according to the context in which the demand for an explanation arises, the type of explana-

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\*See, e.g., W. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957).

tion that is required, the kind of event that is being explained, and so on. Further, it may be contended that, even in cases which appear most amenable to treatment in terms of the "implicit law" model, this type of analysis must be handled with care and can often be regarded as offering no more than a first approximation to a satisfactory elucidation. Thus philosophers who have been impressed by its apparent advantages have sometimes been led to neglect logical distinctions of interest and importance. As Mr. Scriven argues in his article, "Truisms as the Grounds of Historical Explanations," in which a number of comprehensive criticisms of the theory in question are made, the difference between giving an explanation and justifying an explanation has not always been taken into account, with the result that what should properly be considered to be part of the *warrant* for a particular explanation has been treated as if it were an essential feature of the explanation itself, a feature which it is the task of analysis to render explicit. Again, even if it is allowed that there is a sense in which many explanations in history do presuppose general statements, the precise character and logical status of these may be difficult to determine, and the roles they play less straightforward and more various than some philosophers (including myself\*) have at times implied. To understand and accept the explanation a historian offers of some event, it is often necessary—as is frequently pointed out—to be told more of the story, and this is not a matter of being presented with some comprehensive generalization or generalizations, the applicability of which to the case in question can without too much difficulty be demonstrated. Rather, it is a move in the direction of analysis and particularization; certain intermediate stages and links are pointed to and described in a way that makes it clear why a specific event or development should have occurred as a result of the factors initially adduced to explain it. In this sense, supporting or justifying an explanation in history frequently seems to be a matter of tracing in detail connections and patterns which represent, so to speak, its "inside"; only thus can its significance be grasped and its adequacy assessed. Yet, even here, it may still (I think) reasonably be maintained that claims concerning the existence of such connections are (in a large number of instances at least) only made and accepted in the light of general statements of some kind, the bearing of which upon a particular case it often requires understanding and experience to decide.

Whatever the role, or roles, of generalizations in history may be, there is a host of other questions concerning the explanations historians frequently give which may be raised. Thus it has been argued by Professor W. B. Gallie, in his article called "Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences," that it is too often supposed by philosophers that the characteristic form of historical explanation is one in which the historian aims to provide the sufficient conditions of a given historical event. Gallie points out that the historian's purpose is often one of showing how such an event was made *possible* by the occurrence of other preceding events rather than one of demonstrating that it was necessitated by them in a way that would imply that the event explained followed as a predictable consequence of specified "initial conditions." Explanations of this type are often built into the historian's narrative in a way that preserves the continuity of the story by exhibiting the relations of dependence that hold between different events

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\**The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 97-98.



in a series. Again, the whole question of when and under what circumstances a historian considers that an explanation is called for, and the question of what governs his selection of certain factors as being of causal "significance" from a mass of conditions also necessary for the occurrence of a particular event, are problems which deserve a far fuller investigation than they have so far been given. What is meant, for instance, by saying that a particular factor need not be "taken into account," or that one factor is of greater importance than another, or that some particular feature of a situation is the "fundamental" one? Certain aspects of these and related questions are considered in the article by Professor Nagel which has been republished in this volume. There is no doubt that the pursuit of such lines of inquiry is relevant to the appraisal of theories of history like the Marxian, where the idea that there are basic determinants of historical change is a prominent one and has often been used in a highly uncritical fashion to establish conclusions about the inner workings of the historical process.

A further point often raised in connection with historical explanation concerns the specific problems raised by what may (very loosely) be referred to as "motivational explanations." What is it for a historian to employ concepts like *desire*, *purpose*, *intention*, *reason*, *aim*, or *plan* in seeking to render an action or series of actions intelligible? What justifies the use of such notions, and what distinguishes explanations which involve them from explanations which do not? It was, to a considerable extent, the recognition of the central role these types of explanation play in historical narrative and interpretation that underlay many of the contentions put forward by "idealist" philosophers of history: their insistence, for example, upon the need to draw a radical distinction between historical and scientific knowledge, and their emphasis upon the point that historical procedure is *sui generis*. And similar considerations seem to have inspired the rather paradoxical claim, sometimes made, that the concept of *cause* is one for which the historian has no use. While not expressing themselves in such dramatic or unqualified terms, a number of modern philosophers have stressed the importance of trying to give a clear account of what historians are doing when they explain the activities of historical persons or groups by reference to, say, certain ambitions or policies or objectives, at the same time suggesting that confusion will result from treating explanations of this kind as being similar logically to explanations of a characteristically "cause-and-effect" type. Amongst other things, it has been argued that the undertaking of such analyses and the investigation of such distinctions may be helpful in throwing light upon the sources of certain well-known doctrines concerning the special nature of historical understanding: for instance, by clarifying the sense in which the attribution of motives and purposes to historical agents involves an ability on the part of the historian to see and interpret the situation in which they acted as they saw and interpreted it. Nor is this the only area where resistance has been manifested to the notion that all explanations in history can in the end be shown to conform to a single standard pattern. The use of "unifying" concepts like "revolution," "social upheaval," and so forth to group or place historical events may, as Mr. Dray argues, have an important explanatory function: although interpretations of this sort are not usually offered in response to questions like "Why (or how) did this happen?" it does not follow that they do not in their own way explain.

What has been said is perhaps sufficient to show in a general fashion some of

the features of historical writing that have recently attracted the attention of philosophers. Much of their work has taken the direction of emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of history rather than of trying to absorb the historical studies within the framework of a comprehensive picture of human knowledge suggested by the procedures of the natural sciences. It would be misleading, however, to claim that they have shown, or that they have aimed to show, that there exists a clearly marked group of philosophical problems peculiar to history. Many, if not most, of the problems of analysis which a study of the historian's terminology raises also arise in other contexts. The (exceedingly difficult) question of how motivational expressions and explanations are to be interpreted, for example, has been examined by philosophers not specifically concerned with history. To take an instance, the suggestion that to ascribe a motive to a person's behavior is not a matter of postulating the existence of a certain kind of "internal" cause and that different patterns of elucidation are appropriate in the case of explanations involving the use of words like "want," "intend," and so forth has been discussed at length in Professor Ryle's book *The Concept of Mind*. There it is suggested that explaining an action may often be a question of relating what was done to a person's disposition or tendency to act or behave in a certain way. The application of ideas like this one to problems in the philosophy of history is considered by Mr. Donagan in his article, "Explanation in History." He discusses Ryle's conception of the part played in some explanations by "law-like" statements concerning the manner in which an individual person or thing can be expected to behave under specifiable conditions, and indicates its relevance to a problem mentioned earlier in this Introduction—the problem, namely, of whether an intelligible or empirically acceptable account can be given of cases where one event is explained in terms of other events without referring to, or presupposing, general laws. Many other illustrations of the close connections between the philosophical investigation of history and other areas of philosophical inquiry could be cited. One has, for example, only to consider the host of questions concerning the knowledge we claim to have of other people's thoughts, feelings, and states of mind which, although they are of particular importance to the philosopher interested in historical knowledge, are equally part of the general field of philosophical concern.

To say this is partly to draw attention to the fact that history is not furnished with any elaborate technical vocabulary. Thus philosophical problems of the sort that typically arise as a result of reflecting on the relations between conceptual systems devised to meet the requirements of specialized branches of inquiry and "the language of common sense" are not prominent here. That is not to deny that issues in the analysis of some of the concepts employed by historians may be relevant to questions concerning the methodology and terminology of the social sciences. As has already been indicated, an important element in the "anti-historicist" thesis advanced by critics like Popper and Hayek\* is the objection that many nineteenth-century writers, such as Hegel and Comte, regarded social "wholes" rather than individual social phenomena as being the proper objects of historical and sociological theory. They have condemned "holistic" doctrines of this kind on the grounds that, by insisting that the nature of such "wholes" cannot

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\*F. A. von Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (The Free Press, 1952).

be explained by reference to, e.g., individual human beings and their behavior and relations, they have encouraged mistaken beliefs about the character of the laws which can be said to govern social change, as well as unwarrantably fatalistic views concerning the possibilities open to men in the management of their affairs. Thus the attack on "holism" is intimately connected with problems of sociological *method*, with the question of what procedural principles should be adopted in the investigation and interpretation of social phenomena. But it may also raise questions concerning matters of logical analysis. For it may be understood to presuppose the contention that institutional or group concepts of the type referred to as "holistic" can in principle be replaced by non-"holistic" ones without loss of meaning. And determining the validity of such a claim involves examining the role played by "holistic" concepts in the work of historians and social scientists in the light of the reductionist thesis. The articles by Professor Mandelbaum, Mr. Gellner, and Mr. Watkins reprinted here are concerned with aspects of these problems.

It will be noticed that the contributions in the second half of this volume are nearly all by philosophers working in the United States or the British Commonwealth. I have been largely concerned to show how the development of approaches and methods, which have proved fruitful in other areas of philosophical inquiry, have affected the treatment of problems raised by the theoretical examination of history; and it so happens that the systematic employment of these ways of doing philosophy is still chiefly confined to the English-speaking world. But it would be misleading to give the impression that interesting and valuable work has not been done elsewhere by writers using a different idiom and tackling the problems from a different direction. This is particularly evident in the case of books written by men who are themselves professional historians and who are consequently intimately aware of crucial questions of terminology and method. Marc Bloch's *Apologie pour l'histoire*\* is one such book; *De la connaissance historique*, by H.-I. Marrou,\*\* is another.

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\*English translation by Peter Putnam, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1954).

\*\*Editions du Seuil (Paris, 1954).

# Critiques of Classical Theories of History

## KARL R. POPPER

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KARL R. POPPER was born in 1902 in Vienna and studied at the University there from 1919 until 1928. Having published various papers and a book on scientific method, he gave lectures at several philosophic congresses and some English universities. In 1937 he went to Canterbury College, University of New Zealand, as Lecturer and later as Senior Lecturer in Philosophy. In 1945, while still in New Zealand, he was appointed to a Readership in Logic and Scientific Method in the University of London (London School of Economics and Political Science). He was made a D. Litt. of this University in 1948, and promoted to his present position of Professor of Logic and Scientific Method in 1949. He gave the William James Lectures in Philosophy at Harvard University in 1950, and he has also lectured at various other universities in America and in Europe. He is a member of the editorial board of the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, and was Chairman of the Philosophy of Science Group of the British Society for the History of Science from 1951 to 1953. He has been a member of the International Academy for the Philosophy of Science since 1948, and a member of the Council of the Association for Symbolic Logic since 1951. Popper's best-known works are *Logik der Forschung* (1935) and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945). The following article, which has not been published before, is based upon an address delivered to the Plenary Session of the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy, Amsterdam, 1948. A fuller discussion of the problem with which it deals, and of a number of related problems, will be found in Professor Popper's book *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957).

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## Prediction and Prophecy in the Social Sciences

### 1.

The topic of my address is "Prediction and Prophecy in the Social Sciences." My intention is to criticize the doctrine that it is the task of the social sciences to propound historical prophecies, and that historical prophecies are needed if we wish to conduct politics in a rational way. I shall call this doctrine "historicism." I consider historicism to be the relic of an ancient superstition, even though the people who believe in it are usually convinced that it is a very new, progressive, revolutionary, and scientific theory.

The tenets of historicism—that it is the task of the social sciences to propound historical prophecies, and that these historical prophecies are needed for any rational theory—are topical today because they form a very important part of that philosophy which likes to call itself by the name of "Scientific Socialism" or "Marxism." My analysis of the role of prediction and prophecy could therefore be described as a criticism of the historical method of Marxism. But in fact it does not confine itself to that economic variant of historicism which characterizes Marxism, for it aims at criticising the historicist doctrine in general. Nevertheless, I have decided to speak as if Marxism were my main or my only object of attack, since I wish to avoid the accusation that I am attacking Marxism surreptitiously under the name of "historicism." But I should be glad if you would remember that whenever I mention Marxism, I always have in mind a number of other philosophies of history also; for I am trying to criticise a certain historical method which has been believed to be valid by many philosophers, ancient and modern, whose political views were vastly different from those of Marx.

As a critic of Marxism, I shall try to interpret my task in a liberal spirit. I shall feel free not only to criticise Marxism but also to defend certain of its contentions; and I shall feel free to simplify its doctrines radically.

One of the points in which I feel sympathy with Marxists is their insistence that the social problems of our time are urgent, and that philosophers ought to face the issues; that we should not be content to interpret the world but should help to change it. I am very much in sympathy with this attitude, and the choice, by the present assembly, of the theme "Man and Society," shows that the need for discussing these problems is widely recognized. The mortal danger into which mankind has floundered—no doubt the gravest danger in its history—must not be ignored by philosophers.

But what kind of contribution can philosophers make—not just as men, not just as citizens, but as philosophers? Some Marxists insist that the problems are too urgent for further contemplation, and that we ought to take sides at once. But if—as philosophers—we can make any contribution at all then, surely, we must refuse to be rushed into blindly accepting

ready-made conclusions, however great the urgency of the hour; as philosophers we can do no better than bring rational criticism to bear on the problems that face us, and on the solutions advocated by the various parties. To be more specific, I believe that the best I can do as philosopher is to approach the problems armed with the weapons of a critic of methods. This is what I propose to do.

## 2.

I may, by way of introduction, say why I have chosen this particular subject. I am a rationalist, and by this I mean that I believe in discussion, and argument. I also believe in the possibility as well as the desirability of applying science to problems arising in the social field. But believing as I do in social science, I can only look with apprehension upon social pseudo-science.

Many of my fellow-rationalists are Marxists; in England, for example, a considerable number of excellent physicists and biologists emphasize their allegiance to the Marxist doctrine. They are attracted to Marxism by its claim (a) that it is a science, (b) that it is progressive, (c) that it adopts the methods of prediction which the natural sciences practice. Of course, everything depends upon this third claim. I shall therefore try to show that this claim is not justified, and that the kind of prophecies which Marxism offers are in their logical character more akin to those of the Old Testament than to those of modern physics.

## 3.

I shall begin with a brief statement and criticism of the historical method of the alleged science of Marxism. I shall have to oversimplify matters; this is unavoidable. But my oversimplifications may serve the purpose of bringing the decisive points into focus.

The central ideas of the historicist method, and more especially of Marxism, seem to be these:

a. It is a fact that we can prophesy solar eclipses with a high degree of precision, and for a long time ahead. Why should we not be able to predict revolutions? Had a social scientist in 1780 known half as much about society as the old Babylonian astrologists know about astronomy, then he should have been able to predict the French Revolution.

The fundamental idea that it should be possible to predict revolutions just as it is possible to predict solar eclipses gives rise to the following view of the task of the social sciences:

b. The task of the social sciences is fundamentally the same as that of the natural sciences—to make predictions, and, more especially, historical predictions, that is to say, predictions about the social and political development of mankind.

c. Once these predictions are available, the task of politics can be determined. It is to lessen the "birthpangs" (as Marx calls them) unavoidably connected with the political developments which have been predicted as impending.

These simple ideas, especially the one claiming that it is the task of the social sciences to make historical predictions, such as predictions of social revolutions, I shall call the *historicist doctrine of the social sciences*. The idea that it is the task of politics to lessen the birthpangs of impending political developments I shall call the *historicist doctrine of politics*. Both these doctrines may be considered as parts of a wider philosophical scheme which may be called *historicism*—the view that the story of mankind has a plot, and that if we can succeed in unravelling this plot, we shall hold the key to the future.

## 4.

I have briefly outlined two historicist doctrines concerning the task of the social sciences and of politics. I have described these doctrines as Marxist. But they are not peculiar to Marxism. On the contrary, they are among the oldest doctrines in the world. In Marx's own time they were held, in exactly the form described, not only by Marx who inherited them from Hegel, but by John Stuart Mill who inherited them from Comte. And they were held in ancient times by Plato, and before him by Heraclitus and Hesiod. They seem to be of oriental origin; indeed, the Jewish idea of the chosen people is a typical historicist idea—that history has a plot whose author is Jahwe, and the plot can be partly unravelled by the prophets. These ideas express one of the oldest dreams of mankind—the dream of prophecy, the idea that we can know what the future has in store for us, and that we can profit from such knowledge by adjusting our policy to it.

This age-old idea was sustained by the fact that prophecies of eclipses and of the movements of the planets were successful. The close connection between historicist doctrine and astronomical knowledge is clearly exhibited in the idea of astrology.

These historical points have, of course, no bearing on the question whether or not the historicist doctrine concerning the task of the social sciences is tenable. This question belongs to the methodology of the social sciences.

## 5.

The historicist doctrine which teaches that it is the task of the social sciences to predict historical developments is, I believe, untenable.

Admittedly all theoretical sciences are predicting sciences. Admittedly there are social sciences which are theoretical. But do these admissions imply—as the historicists believe—that the task of the social sciences is historical prophecy? It looks like it: but this impression disappears once we make a clear distinction between what I shall call "*scientific prediction*" on the one side and "*unconditional historical prophecies*" on the other. Historicism fails to make this important distinction.

Ordinary predictions in science are conditional. They assert that certain changes (say, of the temperature of water in a kettle) will be accompanied

by other changes (say, the boiling of the water). Or to take a simple example from a social science: Just as we can learn from a physicist that under certain physical conditions a boiler will explode, so we can learn from the economist that under certain social conditions, such as shortage of commodities, controlled prices, and, say, the absence of an effective punitive system, a black market will develop.

Unconditional scientific predictions can sometimes be derived from these conditional scientific predictions, together with historical statements which assert that the conditions in question are fulfilled. (From these premises we can obtain the unconditional prediction by the *modus ponens*). If a physician has diagnosed scarlet fever then he may, with the help of the conditional predictions of his science make the unconditional prediction that his patient will develop a rash of a certain kind. But it is possible, of course, to make such unconditional prophecies without any such justification in a theoretical science, or—in other words—in scientific conditional predictions. They may be based, for example, on a dream—and, by some accident they may even come true.

My contentions are two.

The first is that the historicist does not, as a matter of fact, derive his historical prophecies from conditional scientific predictions. The second (from which the first follows) is that he cannot possibly do so because long term prophecies can be derived from scientific conditional predictions only if they apply to systems which can be described as well isolated, stationary, and recurrent. These systems are very rare in nature; and modern society is surely not one of them.

Let me develop this point a little more fully. Eclipse prophecies, and indeed prophecies based on the regularity of the seasons (perhaps the oldest natural laws consciously understood by man) are possible only because our solar system is a stationary and repetitive system; and this is so because of the accident that it is isolated from the influence of other mechanical systems by immense regions of empty space and is therefore relatively free of interferences from outside. Contrary to popular belief the analysis of such repetitive systems is not typical of natural science. These repetitive systems are special cases where scientific prediction becomes particularly impressive—but that is all. Apart from this very exceptional case, the solar system, recurrent or cyclic systems are known especially in the field of biology. The life cycles of organisms are part of a semi-stationary or very slowly changing biological chain of events. Scientific predictions about life cycles of organisms can be made in so far as we abstract from the slow evolutionary changes, that is to say, in so far as we treat the biological system in question as stationary.

No basis can therefore be found in examples such as these for the contention that we can apply the method of long-term unconditional prophecy to human history. Society is changing, developing. Its development is not, in the main, a repetitive one. True, in so far as it is repetitive, we may perhaps make certain prophecies. For example, there is undoubtedly some repetitiveness in the manner in which new religions arise, or new



tyrannies; and a student of history may find that he can foresee such developments to a limited degree by comparing them with earlier instances, i.e., by studying the conditions under which they arise. But this application of the method of conditional prediction does not take us very far. For the most striking aspects of historical development are non-repetitive. Conditions are changing, and situations arise (for example, in consequence of new scientific discoveries) which are very different from anything that ever happened before. The fact that we can prophesy eclipses does not, therefore, provide a valid reason for expecting that we may predict revolutions.

These considerations hold not only for the evolution of man, but also for the evolution of life in general. There exists no law of evolution, only the historical fact that plants and animals change, or more precisely, that they have changed. The idea of a law which determines the direction and the character of evolution is a typical 19th century mistake, arising out of the general tendency to ascribe to the "Natural Law" the functions traditionally ascribed to God.

## 6.

The realization that the social sciences cannot prophesy future historical developments has led some modern writers to despair of reason, and to advocate political irrationalism. Identifying predictive power with practical usefulness, they denounce the social sciences as useless. In an attempt to analyse the possibility of forecasting historical developments, one of these modern irrationalists writes:<sup>1</sup> "The same element of uncertainty from which the natural sciences suffer affects the social sciences, only more so. Because of its quantitative extension, it affects here not only theoretical structure but also *practical usefulness*."

But there is no need as yet to despair of reason. Only those who do not distinguish between ordinary prediction and historical prophecy, in other words, only historicists (disappointed historicists) are likely to draw such desperate conclusions. The main usefulness of the physical sciences does not lie in the prediction of eclipses; and similarly, the practical usefulness of the social sciences does not depend on their power to prophesy historical or political developments. Only a disappointed historicist, that is to say, one who believes in the historicist doctrine of the task of the social sciences as a matter of course will be driven into despair of reason by the realization that the social sciences cannot prophesy: and he may even be driven into hatred of reason.

## 7.

What, then, is the task of the social sciences, and how can they be useful? In order to answer this question, I shall first briefly mention two naive

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1. H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man and Power Politics*, London, 1947, p. 122, *italics mine*. As indicated in my next paragraph, Morgenthau's anti-rationalism can be understood as resulting from the disillusionment of a historicist who cannot conceive of any other but an historicist rationalism.

theories of society which must be disposed of before we can understand the function of the social sciences.

The first is the theory that the social sciences study the behaviour of social wholes, such as groups, nations, classes, societies, civilizations, etc. These social wholes are conceived as the empirical objects which the social sciences study in the same way in which biology studies animals or plants.

This view must be rejected as naive. It completely overlooks the fact that these so-called social wholes are very largely postulates of popular social theories rather than empirical objects; and that while there are, admittedly, such empirical objects as the crowd of people here assembled, it is quite untrue that names like "the middle-class" stand for any such empirical groups. What they stand for is a kind of ideal object whose existence depends upon theoretical assumptions. Accordingly, the belief in the empirical existence of social wholes or collectives, which may be described as *naive collectivism* has to be replaced by the demand that social phenomena, including collectives, should be analysed in terms of individuals and their actions and relations.

But this demand may easily give rise to another mistaken view, the second and more important of the two views to be disposed of. It may be described as the *conspiracy theory of society*. It is the view that whatever happens in society—including things which people as a rule dislike, such as war, unemployment, poverty, shortages—are the results of direct design by some powerful individuals or groups. This view is very widespread, although it is, I have no doubt, a somewhat primitive kind of superstition. It is older than historicism (which may even be said to be a derivative of the conspiracy theory); and in its modern form, it is the typical result of the secularization of religious superstitions. The belief in the Homeric gods whose conspiracies were responsible for the vicissitudes of the Trojan War is gone. But the place of the gods on Homer's Olympus is now taken by the Learned Elders of Zion, or by the monopolists, or the capitalists, or the imperialists.

Against the Conspiracy Theory of Society, I do not, of course, assert that conspiracies never happen. But I assert two things. First, they are not very frequent, and do not change the character of social life. Assuming that conspiracies were to cease, we should still be faced with fundamentally the same problems which have always faced us. Secondly, I assert that conspiracies are very rarely successful. The results achieved differ widely, as a rule, from the results aimed at. (Consider the Nazi conspiracy).

## 8.

Why do the results achieved by a conspiracy as a rule differ widely from the results aimed at? Because this is what usually happens in social life, conspiracy or no conspiracy. And this remark gives us an opportunity to formulate the *main task of the theoretical social sciences*. It is to trace the *unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions*. I may give a simple example. If a man wishes urgently to buy a house in a certain district, we can safely assume that he does not wish to raise the

market price of houses in that district. But the very fact that he appears on the market as a buyer will tend to raise market prices. And analogous remarks hold for the seller. Or to take an example from a very different field, if a man decides to insure his life, he is unlikely to have the intention of encouraging other people to invest their money in insurance shares. But he will do so nevertheless.

We see here clearly that not all consequences of our actions are intended consequences; and accordingly, that the conspiracy theory of society cannot be true because it amounts to the assertion that all events, even those which at first sight do not seem to be intended by anybody, are the intended results of the actions of people who are interested in these results.

It should be mentioned in this connection that Karl Marx himself was one of the first to emphasize the importance, for the social sciences, of these unintended consequences. In his more mature utterances, he says that we are all caught in the net of the social system. The capitalist is not a demoniac conspirator, but a man who is forced by circumstances to act as he does; he is no more responsible for the state of affairs than the proletarian.

This view of Marx's has been abandoned—perhaps for propagandist reasons, perhaps because people did not understand it—and a Vulgar Marxist Conspiracy theory has very largely replaced it. It is a come-down—the come-down from Marx to Goebbels. But it is clear that the adoption of the conspiracy theory can hardly be avoided by those who believe that they know how to make heaven on earth. The only explanation for their failure to produce heaven are the evil intentions of the devil who has a vested interest in hell.

## 9.

The view that it is the task of the theoretical sciences to discover the unintended consequences of our actions brings these sciences very close to the experimental natural sciences. The analogy cannot here be developed in detail, but it may be remarked that both lead us to the formulation of practical technological rules stating *what we cannot do*.

The second law of thermodynamics can be expressed as the technological warning, "You cannot build a machine which is 100 per cent efficient." A similar rule of the social sciences would be, "You cannot, without increasing productivity, raise the real income of the working population." An example of a promising hypothesis in this field which is by no means generally accepted—or, in other words, a problem that is still open—is the following: "You cannot have a full employment policy without inflation." These examples may show the way in which the social sciences are practically important. They do not allow us to make historical prophecies, but they may give us an idea of what can, and what cannot, be done in the political field.

We have seen that the historicist doctrine is untenable, but this fact does not lead us to lose faith in science or in reason. On the contrary, we now see that it gives rise to a clearer insight into the role of science in

social life. Its practical role is the modest one of helping us to understand even the more remote consequences of possible actions; in other words, to choose our actions more wisely.

# 10.

The elimination of the historicist doctrine destroys Marxism completely as far as its scientific pretensions go. But it does not yet destroy the more technical or political claims of Marxism—that only a social revolution, a complete re-casting of our social system, can produce social conditions fit for men to live in.

I shall not discuss here the problem of the humanitarian aims of Marxism. I find that there is a very great deal in these aims which I can accept. The hope of reducing misery and violence, and of increasing freedom, is one, I believe, which inspired Marx and many of his followers; it is a hope which inspires most of us.

But I am convinced that these aims cannot be realized by revolutionary methods. On the contrary, I am convinced that revolutionary methods can only make things worse—that they will increase unnecessary suffering; that they will lead to more and more violence; and that they must destroy freedom.

This becomes clear when we realize that a revolution always destroys the institutional and traditional framework of society. With it, it must endanger the very set of values for the realization of which it has been undertaken. Indeed, a set of values can have social significance only in so far as there exists a social tradition which upholds them. This is true of the aims of a revolution as much as of any other values.

But if you begin to revolutionize society and to eradicate its traditions, you cannot stop this process if and when you please. In a revolution, everything is questioned, including the aims of the well-meaning revolutionaries; aims which grow from, and which were necessarily a part of, the society which the revolution destroys.

Some people say that they do not mind this; that it is their greatest wish to clean the canvas thoroughly—to create a social *tabula rasa*, and to begin afresh by painting on it a brand new social system. But they should not be surprised if they find that once they destroy tradition, civilization disappears with it. They will find that mankind have returned to the position in which Adam and Eve began,—or, using less biblical language, that they have returned to the beasts. All that these revolutionary progressivists will then be able to do is to begin the slow process of human evolution again (and so to arrive in a few thousand years perhaps at another capitalist period, which will lead them to another sweeping revolution, followed by another return to the beasts, and so on, for ever and ever). In other words, there is no earthly reason why a society whose traditional set of values has been destroyed should, of its own accord, become a better society—unless you believe in political miracles,<sup>2</sup> or hope

2. The phrase is due to Julius Kraft.

that once the conspiracy of the devilish capitalists is broken up, society will naturally tend to become beautiful and good.

Marxists, of course, will not admit this. But the Marxist view, that is to say, the view that the social revolution will lead to a better world, is only understandable on the *historicist assumptions* of Marxism. If you know, on the basis of historical prophecy, what the result of the social revolution must be, and if you know that the result is all that we hope for, then, but only then, can you consider the revolution with its untold suffering as a means to the end of untold happiness. But with the elimination of the historicist doctrine, the theory of revolution becomes completely untenable.

The view that it will be the task of the revolution to rid us of the capitalist conspiracy, and with it, of opposition to social reform, although widely held, is untenable, even if we assume for a moment that such a conspiracy exists. For a revolution is liable to replace old masters by new ones, and who guarantees that the new ones will be better? The theory of revolution overlooks the most important aspect of social life—that what we need is not so much good men as good institutions. Even the best man may be corrupted by power; but institutions which permit the ruled to exert some effective control over the rulers will force even bad rulers to do what the ruled consider to be in their interests. Or to put it another way, we should like to have good rulers, but historical experience shows us that we are not likely to get them. This is why it is of such importance to design institutions which prevent even bad rulers from causing too much damage.

There are only two kinds of governmental institutions, those which provide for a change of the government without bloodshed, and those which do not. But if the government cannot be changed without bloodshed, it cannot, in most cases, be removed at all. We need not quarrel about words, and about such pseudo problems as the true or essential meaning of the word "democracy." You can choose whatever name you like for the two types of government. I personally prefer to call the type of government which can be removed without violence "democracy," and the other "tyranny." But, as I said, this is not a quarrel about words, but an important distinction between two types of institutions.

Marxists have been taught to think in terms not of institutions but of classes. Classes, however, never rule, any more than nations. The rulers are always certain persons. And, whatever class they may once have belonged to, once they are rulers they belong to the ruling class.

Marxists nowadays do not think in terms of institutions; they put their faith in certain personalities, or perhaps in the fact that certain persons were once proletarians—a result of their belief in the over-ruling importance of classes and class loyalties. Rationalists, on the contrary, are more inclined to rely on institutions for controlling men. This is the main difference.

## 11.

But what ought the rulers to do? In opposition to most historicists, I believe that this question is far from vain; it is one which we ought to discuss. For in a democracy, the rulers will be compelled by the threat of

dismissal to do what public opinion wants them to do. And public opinion is a thing which all can influence, and especially philosophers. In democracies, the ideas of philosophers have often influenced future developments—with a very considerable time-lag, to be sure. British social policy is now that of Bentham, and of John Stuart Mill who summed up its aim as that of "securing full employment at high wages for the whole labouring population."<sup>3</sup>

I believe that philosophers should continue to discuss the proper aims of social policy in the light of the experience of the last fifty years. Instead of confining themselves to discussing the "nature" of ethics, or of the greatest good, etc., they should think about such fundamental and difficult ethical and political questions as are raised by the fact that political freedom is impossible without some principle of equality before the law; that, since absolute freedom is impossible, we must, with Kant, demand in its stead an equality with respect to those limitations of freedom which are the unavoidable consequences of social life; and that, on the other hand, the pursuit of equality, especially in its economic sense, much as it is desirable in itself, may become a threat to freedom.

And similarly, they should discuss the fact that the greatest happiness principle of the Utilitarians can easily be made an excuse for a benevolent dictatorship, and the proposal<sup>4</sup> that we should replace it by a more modest and more realistic principle—the principle that the fight against avoidable misery should be a recognized aim of public policy, while the increase of happiness should be left, in the main, to private initiative.

## BERTRAND RUSSELL

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LORD RUSSELL was born in 1872. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he was a scholar, obtaining a first class in Mathematics and in Moral Sciences. He was subsequently a Fellow (1895-1901) and Lecturer (1910-16) at Trinity College. In 1914 he was Herbert Spencer Lecturer at Oxford and, in the same year, Visiting Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. In 1920-21 he was Visiting Professor at The Chinese

3. In his *Autobiography*, 1873, p. 105. My attention has been drawn to this passage by Professor F. A. von Hayek.

4. I am using the term "proposal" here in the technical sense in which it is advocated by Professor L. J. Russell. (Cp. his paper "Propositions and Proposals," in the *Proc. of the Tenth Intern. Congress of Philosophy*, Amsterdam, 1948).

Government University of Peking; in 1926 Turner Lecturer of Cambridge; Special Lecturer at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1937 and at The University of Oxford in 1938; Visiting Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1938-39; and in 1939-40 Professor of Philosophy at the University of California at Los Angeles. He has also been Occasional Lecturer at various universities, including the Universities of Uppsala, Copenhagen, Barcelona and the Sorbonne. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1908 and is holder of the Nicholas Murray Butler Medal of Columbia University (1915), the Sylvester Medal of the Royal Society (1932), the de Morgan Medal of the London Mathematical Society (1933) and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1950). He was awarded the Order of Merit in 1948. Apart from his numerous contributions to philosophy, logic and mathematics, his publications include books on education, politics and history. Russell has discussed Marxism in several of his works including *German Social Democracy* (1896), *Roads to Freedom* (1918), and *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920).

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## Dialectical Materialism\*

The contributions of Marx and Engels to theory were twofold: there was Marx's theory of surplus value, and there was their joint theory of historical development, called "dialectical materialism." We will consider first the latter, which seems to me both more true and more important than the former.

Let us, in the first place, endeavor to be clear as to what the theory of dialectical materialism is. It is a theory which has various elements. Metaphysically it is materialistic: in method it adopts a form of dialectic suggested by Hegel, but differing from his in many important respects. It takes over from Hegel an outlook which is evolutionary, and in which the stages of evolution can be characterized in clear logical terms. These changes are of the nature of development, not so much in an ethical as in a logical sense—that is to say, they proceed according to a plan which a man of sufficient intellect could, theoretically, foretell, and which Marx himself professes to have foretold, in its main outlines, up to the moment of the universal establishment of Communism. The materialism of its metaphysics is translated, where human affairs are concerned, into the doctrine that the prime cause of all social phenomena is the method of production and exchange prevailing

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\*This selection is Chapter XVIII of *Freedom and Organization, 1814-1914*. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of Bertrand Russell and George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

at any given period. The clearest statements of the theory are to be found in Engels, in his *Anti-Dühring*, of which the relevant parts have appeared in England under the title: *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*. A few extracts will help to provide us with our text:

"It was seen that *all* past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles: that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and of exchange—in a word, of the economic conditions of their time; that the *economic* structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period."

The discovery of this principle, according to Marx and Engels, showed that the coming of Socialism was inevitable.

"From that time forward Socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Its task was no longer to manufacture a system of society as perfect as possible, but to examine the historico-economic succession of events from which these classes and their antagonism had of necessity sprung, and to discover in the economic conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict. But the Socialism of earlier days was as incompatible with this materialistic conception as the conception of Nature of the French materialists was with dialectics and modern natural science. The Socialism of earlier days certainly criticized the existing capitalistic mode of production and its consequences. But it could not explain them, and, therefore, could not get the mastery of them. It could only simply reject them as bad. The more strongly this earlier Socialism denounced the exploitation of the working-class, inevitable under Capitalism, the less able was it clearly to show in what the exploitation consisted and how it arose."

The same theory which is called Dialectical Materialism, is also called the Materialist Conception of History. Engels says: "The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch. The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreason, and right wrong, is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place, with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. From this it also follows that



the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light, must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves. These means are not to be invented by deduction from fundamental principles, but are to be discovered in the stubborn facts of the existing system of production."

The conflicts which lead to political upheavals are not primarily mental conflicts in the opinions and passions of human beings.

"This conflict between productive forces and modes of production is not a conflict engendered in the mind of man, like that between original sin and divine justice. It exists, in fact, objectively outside us, independently of the will and actions even of the men that have brought it on. Modern Socialism is nothing but the reflex, in thought, of this conflict in fact; its ideal reflection in the minds, first, of the class directly suffering under it, the working-class."

There is a good statement of the materialist theory of history in an early joint work of Marx and Engels (1845-6), called *German Ideology*. It is there said that the materialist theory starts with the actual process of production of an epoch, and regards as the basis of history the form of economic life connected with this form of production and generated by it. This, they say, shows civil society in its various stages and in its action as the State. Moreover, from the economic basis the materialist theory explains such matters as religion, philosophy, and morals, and the reason for the course of their development.

These quotations perhaps suffice to show what the theory is. A number of questions arise as soon as it is examined critically. Before going on to economics one is inclined to ask, first, whether materialism is true in philosophy, and second, whether the elements of Hegelian dialectic which are embedded in the Marxist theory of development can be justified apart from a full-fledged Hegelianism. Then comes the further question whether these metaphysical doctrines have any relevance to the historical thesis as regards economic development, and last of all comes the examination of this historical thesis itself. To state in advance what I shall be trying to prove, I hold (1) that materialism, in some sense, may be true, though it cannot be known to be so; (2) that the elements of dialectic which Marx took over from Hegel made him regard history as a more rational process than it has in fact been, convincing him that all changes must be in some sense progressive, and giving him a feeling of certainty in regard to the future, for which there is no scientific warrant; (3) that the whole of his theory of economic development may perfectly well be true if his metaphysics is false, and false if his metaphysics is true, and that but for the influence of Hegel it would never have occurred to him that a matter so purely empirical could depend upon abstract metaphysics; (4) with regard to the economic interpretation of history, it seems to me very largely true, and a most important contribution to sociology; I cannot, however, regard it as *wholly* true, or feel any confidence that all great historical changes can be viewed as developments. Let us take these points one by one.

(1) *Materialism*. Marx's materialism was of a peculiar kind, by no

means identical with that of the eighteenth century. When he speaks of the "materialist conception of history," he never emphasizes philosophical materialism, but only the economic causation of social phenomena. His philosophical position is best set forth (though very briefly) in his *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach* (1845). In these he says:

"The chief defect of all previous materialism—including that of Feuerbach—is that the object (Gegenstand), the reality, sensibility, is only apprehended under the form of the object (Objekt) or of contemplation (Anschauung), but not as human sensible activity or practice, not subjectively. Hence it came about that the active side was developed by idealism in opposition to materialism. . . .

"The question whether objective truth belongs to human thinking is not a question of theory, but a practical question. The truth, i.e. the reality and power, of thought must be demonstrated in practice. The contest as to the reality or nonreality of a thought which is isolated from practice, is a purely scholastic question. . . .

"The highest point that can be reached by contemplative materialism, i.e. by materialism which does not regard sensibility as a practical activity, is the contemplation of isolated individuals in 'bourgeois society.'

"The standpoint of the old materialism is 'bourgeois' society; the standpoint of the new is *human* society or socialized (vergesellschaftete) humanity.

"Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, but the real task is to *alter* it."

The philosophy advocated in the earlier part of these theses is that which has since become familiar to the philosophical world through the writings of Dr. Dewey, under the name of pragmatism or instrumentalism. Whether Dr. Dewey is aware of having been anticipated by Marx, I do not know, but undoubtedly their opinions as to the metaphysical status of matter are virtually identical. In view of the importance attached by Marx to his theory of matter, it may be worth while to set forth his view rather more fully.

The conception of "matter," in old-fashioned materialism, was bound up with the conception of "sensation." Matter was regarded as the cause of sensation, and originally also as its object, at least in the case of sight and touch. Sensation was regarded as something in which a man is passive, and merely receives impressions from the outer world. This conception of sensation as passive is, however,—so the instrumentalists contend—an unreal abstraction, to which nothing actual corresponds. Watch an animal receiving impressions connected with another animal: its nostrils dilate, its ears twitch, its eyes are directed to the right point, its muscles become taut in preparation for appropriate movements. All this is action, mainly of a sort to improve the informative quality of impressions, partly such as to lead to fresh action in relation to the object. A cat seeing a mouse is by no means a passive recipient of purely contemplative impressions. And as a cat with a mouse, so is a textile manufacturer with a bale of cotton. The bale of cotton is an opportunity for action, it is something to be transformed. The

machinery by which it is to be transformed is explicitly and obviously a product of human activity. Roughly speaking, all matter, according to Marx, is to be thought of as we naturally think of machinery: it has a raw material giving opportunity for action, but in its completed form it is a human product.

Philosophy has taken over from the Greeks a conception of passive contemplation, and has supposed that knowledge is obtained by means of contemplation. Marx maintains that we are always active, even when we come nearest to pure "sensation": we are never merely apprehending our environment, but always at the same time altering it. This necessarily makes the older conception of knowledge inapplicable to our actual relations with the outer world. In place of knowing an object in the sense of passively receiving an impression of it, we can only know it in the sense of being able to act upon it successfully. That is why the test of all truth is practical. And since we change the object when we act upon it, truth ceases to be static, and becomes something which is continually changing and developing. That is why Marx calls his materialism "dialectical," because it contains within itself, like Hegel's dialectic, an essential principle of progressive change.

I think it may be doubted whether Engels quite understood Marx's views on the nature of matter and on the pragmatic character of truth; no doubt he thought he agreed with Marx, but in fact he came nearer to orthodox materialism.<sup>1</sup> Engels explains "historical materialism," as he understands it, in an Introduction, written in 1892, to his *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*. Here, the part assigned to action seems to be reduced to the conventional task of scientific verification. He says: "The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions. . . . Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense-perceptions, scientifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense-perceptions of it."

There is no trace, here, of Marx's pragmatism, or of the doctrine that sensible objects are largely the products of our own activity. But there is also no sign of any consciousness of disagreement with Marx. It may be that Marx modified his views in later life, but it seems more probable that, on this subject as on some others, he held two different views simultaneously, and applied the one or the other as suited the purpose of his argument. He certainly held that some propositions were "true" in a more than pragmatic sense. When, in *Capital*, he sets forth the cruelties of the industrial system as reported by Royal Commissions, he certainly holds that these cruelties really took place, and not only that successful action will result from supposing that they took place. Similarly, when he prophesies the Communist revolution, he believes that there will be such an event, not merely that it is convenient to think so. His pragmatism must, therefore, have been only

1. Cf. Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, p. 32.

occasional—in fact when, on pragmatic grounds, it was justified by being convenient.

It is worth noting that Lenin, who does not admit any divergence between Marx and Engels, adopts in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* a view which is more nearly that of Engels than that of Marx.

For my part, while I do not think that materialism can be *proved*, I think Lenin is right in saying that it is not *disproved* by modern physics. Since his time, and largely as a reaction against his success, respectable physicists have moved further and further from materialism, and it is naturally supposed, by themselves and by the general public, that it is physics which has caused this movement. I agree with Lenin that no substantially new argument has emerged since the time of Berkeley, with one exception. This one exception, oddly enough, is the argument set forth by Marx in his theses on Feuerbach, and completely ignored by Lenin. If there is no such thing as sensation, if matter as something which we passively apprehend is a delusion, and if "truth" is a practical rather than a theoretical conception, then old-fashioned materialism, such as Lenin's, becomes untenable. And Berkeley's view becomes equally untenable, since it removes the object in relation to which we are active. Marx's instrumentalist theory, though he calls it materialistic, is really not so. As against materialism, its arguments have indubitably much force. Whether it is ultimately valid is a difficult question, as to which I have deliberately refrained from expressing an opinion, since I could not do so without writing a complete philosophical treatise.

(2) *Dialectic in History.* The Hegelian dialectic was a full-blooded affair. If you started with any partial concept and meditated on it, it would presently turn into its opposite; it and its opposite would combine into a synthesis, which would, in turn, become the starting point of a similar movement, and so on until you reached the Absolute Idea, on which you could reflect as long as you liked without discovering any new contradictions. The historical development of the world in time was merely an objectification of this process of thought. This view appeared possible to Hegel, because for him mind was the ultimate reality; for Marx, on the contrary, matter is the ultimate reality. Nevertheless he continues to think that the world develops according to a logical formula. To Hegel, the development of history is as logical as a game of chess. Marx and Engels keep the rules of chess, while supposing that the chessmen move themselves in accordance with the laws of physics, without the intervention of a player. In one of the quotations from Engels which I gave earlier, he says: "The means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light, *must* also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves." This "must" betrays a relic of the Hegelian belief that logic rules the world. Why should the outcome of a conflict in politics always be the establishment of some more developed system? This has not, in fact, been the case in innumerable instances. The barbarian invasion of Rome did not give rise to more developed economic forms, nor did the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, or the destruction of the Albigenses in the South of France. Before the time of Homer the

Mycenaean civilization had been destroyed, and it was many centuries before a developed civilization again emerged in Greece. The examples of decay and retrogression are at least as numerous and as important in history as the examples of development. The opposite view, which appears in the works of Marx and Engels, is nothing but nineteenth-century optimism.

This is a matter of practical as well as theoretical importance. Communists always assume that conflicts between Communism and capitalism, while they may for a time result in partial victories for capitalism, must in the end lead to the establishment of Communism. They do not envisage another possible result, quite as probable, namely, a return to barbarism. We all know that modern war is a somewhat serious matter, and that in the next world war it is likely that large populations will be virtually exterminated by poison gases and bacteria. Can it be seriously supposed that after a war in which the great centres of population and most important industrial plants had been wiped out, the remaining population would be in a mood to establish scientific Communism? Is it not practically certain that the survivors would be in a mood of gibbering and superstitious brutality, fighting all against all for the last turnip or the last mangelwurzel? Marx used to do his work in the British Museum, but after the Great War the British Government placed a tank just outside the museum, presumably to teach the intellectuals their place. Communism is a highly intellectual, highly civilized doctrine, which can, it is true, be established, as it was in Russia, after a slight preliminary skirmish, such as that of 1914-18, but hardly after a really serious war. I am afraid the dogmatic optimism of the Communist doctrine must be regarded as a relic of Victorianism.

There is another curious point about the Communist interpretation of the dialectic. Hegel, as everyone knows, concluded his dialectical account of history with the Prussian State, which, according to him, was the perfect embodiment of the Absolute Idea. Marx, who had no affection for the Prussian State, regarded this as a lame and impotent conclusion. He said that the dialectic should be essentially revolutionary, and seemed to suggest that it could not reach any final static resting-place. Nevertheless we hear nothing about the further revolutions that are to happen after the establishment of Communism. In the last paragraph of *La Misère de la Philosophie* he says:

It is only in an order of things in which there will no longer be classes or class-antagonism that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*.

What these social evolutions are to be, or how they are to be brought about without the motive power of class conflict, Marx does not say. Indeed, it is hard to see how, on his theory, any further evolution would be possible. Except from the point of view of present-day politics, Marx's dialectic is no more revolutionary than that of Hegel. Moreover, since all human development has, according to Marx, been governed by conflicts of classes, and since under Communism there is to be only one class, it follows that there can be no further development, and that mankind must go on forever and ever in a state of Byzantine immobility. This does not seem plau-

sible, and it suggests that there must be other possible causes of political events besides those of which Marx has taken account.

(3) *Irrelevance of Metaphysics.* The belief that metaphysics has any bearing upon practical affairs is, to my mind, a proof of logical incapacity. One finds physicists with all kinds of opinions: some follow Hume, some Berkeley, some are conventional Christians, some are materialists, some are sensationalists, some even are solipsists. This makes no difference whatever to their physics. They do not take different views as to when eclipses will occur, or what are the conditions of the stability of a bridge. That is because, in physics, there is some genuine knowledge, and whatever metaphysical beliefs a physicist may hold must adapt themselves to this knowledge. In so far as there is any genuine knowledge in the social sciences, the same thing is true. Whenever metaphysics is really useful in reaching a conclusion, that is because the conclusion cannot be reached by scientific means, i.e. because there is no good reason to suppose it true. What can be known, can be known without metaphysics, and whatever needs metaphysics for its proof cannot be proved. In actual fact Marx advances in his books much detailed historical argument, in the main perfectly sound, but none of this in any way depends upon materialism. Take, for example, the fact that free competition tends to end in monopoly. This is an empirical fact, the evidence for which is equally patent whatever one's metaphysic may happen to be. Marx's metaphysic comes in in two ways: on the one hand, by making things more cut and dried and precise than they are in real life; on the other hand, in giving him a certainty about the future which goes beyond what a scientific attitude would warrant. But in so far as his doctrines of historical development can be shown to be true, his metaphysic is irrelevant. The question whether Communism is going to become universal, is quite independent of metaphysics. It may be that a metaphysic is helpful in the fight: early Mohammedan conquests were much facilitated by the belief that the faithful who died in battle went straight to Paradise, and similarly the efforts of Communists may be stimulated by the belief that there is a God called Dialectical Materialism Who is fighting on their side, and will, in His own good time, give them the victory. On the other hand, there are many people to whom it is repugnant to have to profess belief in propositions for which they see no evidence, and the loss of such people must be reckoned as a disadvantage resulting from the Communist metaphysic.

(4) *Economic Causation in History.* In the main I agree with Marx, that economic causes are at the bottom of most of the great movements in history, not only political movements, but also those in such departments as religion, art, and morals. There are, however, important qualifications to be made. In the first place, Marx does not allow nearly enough for the time-lag. Christianity, for example, arose in the Roman Empire, and in many respects bears the stamp of the social system of that time, but Christianity has survived through many changes. Marx treats it as moribund. "When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the eighteenth century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death-battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie." (*Manifesto of the Communist*

*Party* by Karl Marx and F. Engels.) Nevertheless, in his own country it remained the most powerful obstacle to the realization of his own ideas,<sup>2</sup> and throughout the Western world its political influence is still enormous. I think it may be conceded that *new* doctrines that have any success must bear some relation to the economic circumstances of their age, but old doctrines can persist for many centuries without any such relation of any vital kind.

Another point where I think Marx's theory of history is too definite is that he does not allow for the fact that a small force may tip the balance when two great forces are in approximate equilibrium. Admitting that the great forces are generated by economic causes, it often depends upon quite trivial and fortuitous events which of the great forces gets the victory. In reading Trotsky's account of the Russian Revolution, it is difficult to believe that Lenin made no difference, but it was touch and go whether the German Government allowed him to get to Russia. If the Minister concerned had happened to be suffering from dyspepsia on a certain morning, he might have said "No" when in fact he said "Yes," and I do not think it can be rationally maintained that without Lenin the Russian Revolution would have achieved what it did. To take another instance: if the Prussians had happened to have a good General at the battle of Valmy, they might have wiped out the French Revolution. To take an even more fantastic example, it may be maintained quite plausibly that if Henry VIII had not fallen in love with Anne Boleyn, the United States would not now exist. For it was owing to this event that England broke with the Papacy, and therefore did not acknowledge the Pope's gift of the Americas to Spain and Portugal. If England had remained Catholic, it is probable that what is now the United States would have been part of Spanish America.

This brings me to another point in which Marx's philosophy of history was faulty. He regards economic conflicts as always conflicts between classes, whereas the majority of them have been between races or nations. English industrialism of the early nineteenth century was internationalist, because it expected to retain its monopoly of industry. It seemed to Marx, as it did to Cobden, that the world was going to be increasingly cosmopolitan. Bismarck, however, gave a different turn to events, and industrialism ever since has grown more and more nationalistic. Even the conflict between capitalism and Communism takes increasingly the form of a conflict between nations. It is true, of course, that the conflicts between nations are very largely economic, but the grouping of the world by nations is itself determined by causes which are in the main not economic.

Another set of causes which have had considerable importance in history are those which may be called medical. The Black Death, for example, was an event of whose importance Marx was well aware, but the causes of the Black Death were only in part economic. Undoubtedly it would not have occurred among populations at a higher economic level, but Europe had been quite as poor for many centuries as it was in 1348, so that the proxi-

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2. "For Germany," wrote Marx in 1844, "the critique of religion is essentially completed."

mate cause of the epidemic cannot have been poverty. Take again such a matter as the prevalence of malaria and yellow fever in the tropics, and the fact that these diseases have now become preventable. This is a matter which has very important economic effects, though not itself of an economic nature.

Much the most necessary correction in Marx's theory is as to the causes of changes in methods of production. Methods of production appear in Marx as prime causes, and the reasons for which they change from time to time are left completely unexplained. As a matter of fact, methods of production change, in the main, owing to intellectual causes, owing, that is to say, to scientific discoveries and inventions. Marx thinks that discoveries and inventions are made when the economic situation calls for them. This, however, is a quite unhistorical view. Why was there practically no experimental science from the time of Archimedes to the time of Leonardo? For six centuries after Archimedes the economic conditions were such as should have made scientific work easy. It was the growth of science after the Renaissance that led to modern industry. This intellectual causation of economic processes is not adequately recognized by Marx.

History can be viewed in many ways, and many general formulae can be invented which cover enough of the ground to seem adequate if the facts are carefully selected. I suggest, without undue solemnity, the following alternative theory of the causation of the Industrial Revolution: industrialism is due to modern science, modern science is due to Galileo, Galileo is due to Copernicus, Copernicus is due to the Renaissance, the Renaissance is due to the fall of Constantinople, the fall of Constantinople is due to the migration of the Turks, the migration of the Turks is due to the desiccation of Central Asia. Therefore the fundamental study in searching for historical causes is hydrography.

## W. H. WALSH

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*the Aristotelian Society, Philosophy, The Philosophical Quarterly*, etc. The article printed here has not previously been published.

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## “Meaning” in History

Discussions about meaning in history often reach a stage where the issue to be decided is presented in the following form. Either (it is said) we must admit that history has a meaning, that there is point, significance, intelligibility in the historical process as a whole, or we must accept the view that history is a chaotic aggregate of unconnected events and processes, lacking all rhyme or reason. I want to begin my discussion by making some comments on this crude, but nevertheless fairly common, way of thinking about the matter.

The argument we have to consider may be put in the briefest possible form if we say: either history is meaningful, or it is unintelligible. Stated thus the argument has rhetorical force because we all know that, dark as many of the details of past happenings are and obscure as are their connections, it is at any rate the aim of historians to lessen the darkness and remove the obscurity; in a word, to make the past as intelligible as it can be made, when consideration is given to the nature of the task and the equipment and resources of those who undertake it. No historian at any rate would accept the statement that history is unintelligible, though all would want to insist on the difficulties of attaining a proper understanding of the events with which they are concerned; and the suggestion is that to grant this point is to grant that history is meaningful. In one sense I think it is, but not in the sense intended by those who put forward the argument.

Consider the ideas of *making sense of a set of historical events* and *achieving historical understanding*, and consider them first with reference to the everyday work of historians. Both ideas are difficult to analyse in detail, yet historians are extremely familiar with the activities in question. Even non-historians have some idea of them, if only from their own intermittent and fumbling efforts to make sense of the recent past, to achieve understanding of such bits of history as intimately concern them. We all know that, to make sense of a given piece of history, what has to be done is to see connections between different historical events, to show how one action or happening led on to another; to show perhaps further how certain forces or factors were continuously operative and certain policies continuously realised or striven for in the period under consideration. We know that the historian who can only establish what occurred but is not in a position to explain why things occurred as they did has by no means

completed his task; though we ought to add that it is not normally a question of first finding out what happened and then making sense of it. Most historians manage to combine the activities of describing and explaining, and all would like to do so if they could.

I have put this point elsewhere<sup>1</sup> by arguing that it is the business of historians to construct, not just a plain narrative of what occurred in the past, but what I call a *significant* narrative. By this phrase I mean a narrative which is, in a sense, self-explanatory; which makes us see not only the order of the events but also their connections. In such a narrative events are differentiated according to their importance, some being picked out as having vitally influenced subsequent developments or as significantly foreshadowing what was to come, others presented as following naturally from what preceded them. A narrative of this kind is indispensable if we are to answer the questions which teachers of history put to their pupils and independent students of the subject to themselves; such questions as "What difference did it make to the policies of Gladstone that he was a high churchman?" and "What was the significance of the career of Stresemann?"

In a broad sense these are causal questions, and a significant historical narrative is a causal narrative. But this statement must not be misunderstood. The notion of causation, as Aristotle saw long ago, is a complex one; statements of radically different types are brought together under the general rubric "causal statement." Take the following instances, invented by me but to which parallels could be found in any history book:

- (1) The industrial disputes of the 1920's were, in part at least, responsible for the economic difficulties of the early 1930's.
- (2) Hitler's overweening vanity explains his failure to see how perilous was the German situation after Stalingrad.
- (3) The Russian refusal of Marshall Aid becomes intelligible when seen as part of a wider policy of withdrawal from the bourgeois world.

These instances illustrate, respectively, what Aristotle called efficient, formal and final causation; they give different sorts of answer to the question "Why?" Asked to account for a particular historical event, we may and commonly do refer to some antecedent event of which it was the consequence, but equally we may, as Mr. Gardiner has pointed out<sup>2</sup>, give an answer in dispositional terms, on the model of "The glass broke because it was brittle" (it is in this way that Spartan xenophobia and German nationalism function as historical causes), or again by specifying the wider purpose or purposes of the persons concerned, or mentioning what they had in mind in acting as they did. In every case it is perfectly proper to begin our account with the words "X occurred *because* . . ." though to speak of a "cause" in all three cases would perhaps be to strain language. Certainly in the last type of case, a very important one for historians, it would be more natural to say that we were giving the reason for the action rather than specifying its cause.

1. *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London, 1951), ch. II.

2. *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1952), Part IV.

Some philosophers, among them Professor Oakeshott<sup>3</sup>, have held that the word "cause" is no proper part of the historian's vocabulary. The considerations which move them to adopt this surprising view, so obviously in conflict with actual historical practice, are perhaps these. First, since the time of Hume, and indeed since the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, philosophers (though not perhaps plain men) have tended to equate the terms "cause" and "efficient cause"; the emptiness of the notions of formal and final cause, as applied in medieval physics, led to their almost total discredit when that system was overthrown, with the result that little or no attention was paid to the large part they play in ordinary (i.e. non-scientific) thought. Second and more important, though there is a place in history for efficient causation, that concept emphatically does not have the importance for the historian which it had for the classical physicist. Because the primary concern of historians is with the actions of human beings, questions about purposes, intentions, policies, ends are naturally uppermost in their minds. What might be described as the historian's standard move in seeking to understand a puzzling series of events is to reconstruct the thoughts of the agents concerned. Discovering the thought behind an action not only renders it intelligible in itself, but further serves to link it intrinsically with other actions which embody the same idea; a fact which illuminates the common historical procedure of explaining an event by locating it in its context, showing that it fits in with earlier and later events as part of the carrying out of a deliberate policy ("The Reform Movement") or, failing that, of a recognizable trend or development ("The Evolution of Parliament"). But before you can reconstruct what a man thought on a given occasion you have to specify the situation in which he was and the state of mind in which he approached it; and here reference must be made to the forces acting on him (coming out in such facts as that he was ill or tired or being blackmailed) and also to permanent features of his character (as that he was by nature rash or excessively sanguine or easily irritated). Efficient and formal causation are here brought in to supplement explanation in terms of purposes. What is more, there are occasions when the historian cannot get beyond the stage of describing the situation in which the man about whom he is writing found himself; he cannot fully reconstruct the thought behind his actions, cannot see how he came to act as he did. On these occasions explanations in terms of external and internal factors, of a kind which could be broadly classified as psychological, not merely supplement but actually replace explanation in terms of purposes. Nevertheless, most historians would agree that when such a situation arose they were having to be content with a *pis aller*; and this is what lies behind the attempt to extrude causes (i.e. efficient causes) from history. The contention that the word "cause" has no place in history, misleading as it is, serves (like the similarly misleading slogan that all history is the history of thought) to remind us that historical understanding is not achieved until the historian manages to get inside the events he studies and see them as they might have presented themselves to the agents con-

3. *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), especially p. 131.

earned. So long as his point of view remains external he will think there is more to be done; though it must be added that there are cases, perhaps fewer than one would initially think, where agents fly in the face of reason or act "for no reason at all," in which further understanding is not to be had.<sup>4</sup>

These controversies about the precise nature of the connections which historians seek to establish between the events they study do not materially affect the point made above about the significant character of historical narrative at its best. To repeat the point very briefly: what we want from historians is never a mere chronicle or catalogue, in which events are set down in chronological order but are otherwise unrelated, but an account which brings out their connections and bearing one on another. And when historians are in a position to give such an account it may be said that they have succeeded in "making sense of" or "understanding" their material. The various bits of information which constitute their initial evidence and which may well seem at first sight to have nothing to do with one another are at this stage transformed into a coherent whole; instead of a series of entries in a card index we now have a connected story which, if it never quite attains the unity and tidiness of a play or novel, at least contains a number of recognizable themes. The logical character of what is here being attempted comes out in the language used: the presence of phrases like "becomes intelligible when we take into account . . .," "naturally led to . . .," "still more significant was . . ." and so on are pointers to the explanatory character of the whole enterprise. To explain is to render intelligible; it is to find meaning and point in material initially not seen to have meaning and point.

That history is meaningful, i.e. intelligible in principle in the light of such explanatory procedures as we can bring to bear on it, is so far from being a matter of dispute that every historian assumes it. But of course those who claim that history has a meaning must do much more than repeat this comparatively uninteresting proposition. Something of what they must do may begin to appear if we consider a parallel case. Just as historians assume without question that history is meaningful in the sense explained, so do natural scientists assume that nature is orderly. To say that nature is orderly is to say, in effect, that all natural events can be brought under laws. Now some have thought that nature could be shown to be intelligible in a more exciting sense than this. Hegel, for example, held that it was possible to discern in natural phenomena reflections of what he called "the Logical Idea"; thanks to this, philosophy of nature could, in his view, make sense of natural events (or see significance in them) in a way altogether more profound than any open to merely empirical enquirers. Again, Hegel held that philosophers (Hegelian philosophers at any rate) could see the point of there being such a thing as nature at all: nature was the sphere in which

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4. The topics mentioned in this paragraph are dealt with at length and most effectively in Mr. W. H. Dray's *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957), chs. IV and V. For a statement by a historian supporting the view argued for in the text see Professor Butterfield's *History and Human Relations* (London, 1951), pp. 145-46.

"the Idea" necessarily externalised itself, to "return to itself" again in the form of mental life. Fortunately it is not necessary to discuss these difficult speculations here; my purpose in mentioning them is only to make clear that, whatever their value, they have no direct bearing on scientific work proper. The question of the intelligibility of nature as it affects the scientist is entirely separate from the question of the intelligibility of nature as conceived by the Hegelian philosopher. Nor is this result altered by the claim that the understanding of nature is improved if the details of Hegel's logic are brought to bear on it. Collingwood<sup>5</sup> argued that Hegel showed remarkable prescience in some parts of his work on philosophy of nature, but less enthusiastic commentators are inclined to ascribe his anticipations of later scientific ideas, such as they are, to lucky guesses rather than the possession of superior equipment. The improvement of our understanding of nature which acquaintance with Hegel brings, if it is an improvement, is not the sort of improved understanding which the scientist seeks. And indeed not even the most ardent admirer of Hegel would suggest that the relevant parts of his writings should be compulsory reading in science courses.

If this parallel can be relied on we can conclude that when someone asks whether history has a meaning in what I may be allowed to call the strong sense of "meaning" (I shall attempt an analysis of the concept presently), he is asking a question which has no special concern for historians. The question whether history has a meaning in this special sense is extra-historical, just as the question whether nature is intelligible in the Hegelian sense is extra-scientific. To call attention to the activities of historians will no more settle the first than to call attention to the activities of scientists will settle the second. This may seem a trivial point to insist on, but it is, I believe, of considerable importance. Failure to make it, as I hope to make clear at the end of this paper, is partly responsible for the extraordinarily hostile reception given by professional historians to the work of Toynbee: like Toynbee himself, they imagine that *A Study of History* is itself a work of history, when it is clearly nothing of the sort. Readers of Toynbee will remember how, in arguing against what he calls the "antinomianism" of historians, he makes great play with the point that writers like Fisher, who profess to find no pattern in history, themselves impose patterns when, for instance, they think of the history of Europe as an intelligible unity.<sup>6</sup> This type of argument has a continuing appeal to the tender-minded, but it is, for all that, a thoroughly bad one. Just as the fact that a scientist succeeds in understanding a set of previously puzzling phenomena is without relevance to the thesis that we can make sense of nature as a whole, so is the historian's

5. *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford, 1945), pp. 121-32.

6. *A Study of History* (London, 1934-54), Vols. V, p. 414, and IX, p. 195. Fisher wrote (in the preface to his *History of Europe*, London, 1935): "Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in History a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one great emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave; only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations." Although I disagree with Toynbee's comment on this passage I should not be prepared to endorse the view that we cannot generalize about historical events. See further below.

activity of establishing order in his material irrelevant to the question whether a pattern can be discerned in history.

It may be suggested at this point that the analogy between science and history has here been pressed too hard. There is a common view, more often vaguely felt than clearly formulated, to the effect that the historian puts more of himself into his work than the scientist, and this is connected with the fact that the subject-matter of history is the doings and sufferings of human beings, as opposed to natural processes to which human passions, hopes and fears are not directly relevant. Because we are men ourselves, we cannot fail to be stirred by men's triumphs in the past and cast down by their failures, nor can we look with a quite impartial eye on manifestations of vice and virtue. Hence, it is argued, what might be called the historical attitude differs profoundly from the scientific attitude, and hence the scientist's activity of interpreting his material cannot be properly compared with the historian's activity of interpreting his.

It is certainly true that the difference between the subject-matters of natural science and history has important consequences for the subject we are considering. The fact that historians are primarily concerned with human actions and that they are human agents themselves means that they can adopt some explanatory procedures which are not open to their scientific colleagues. A meteorologist who was asked the point of a prolonged spell of cold weather would either interpret this as a request for an explanation in terms of cold air masses, ridges of pressure, etc., or be baffled as to what sort of answer was expected; an historian asked the point of a prolonged period of diplomatic activity would certainly not be similarly puzzled. He would know that an answer was required in terms of someone's, or some group of persons', purposes, and he would know, in principle, how to set about getting the answer. Again, it would be idle to deny that the study of human doings in the past rouses men's passions as the study of nature does not (we may regret many things which happen naturally, but it would be foolish to visit them with moral condemnation), and that this circumstance adds enormously to the difficulties of attaining historical understanding. The question of the extent to which what may be called philosophical elements enter into the everyday work of historians, and particularly into the "interpretations" which they offer of whole periods or developments, perhaps deserves more careful consideration than it has received. But important and interesting as these points are, they will scarcely bear the weight which critics try to put upon them. Whatever the extent to which philosophical elements enter into an historian's overall point of view, there can be no doubt that in his detailed work he is expected to be as impersonal as any scientist. Historical conclusions must be backed by evidence just as scientific conclusions must. Nor does the fact, if it is a fact, that every historian looks at the past from a particular point of view mean that he necessarily tries to fit all past events into a single picture. Seeing history as a whole is something of which working historians conspicuously fight shy: it is with the details of the past that they regard themselves as properly concerned.

It is therefore one thing to look for meaning in history, another to seek for the meaning of history. How great the difference between the two is may come out if we try to specify what "meaning" in the strong sense involves. We may note first that, whereas historians always look for the meaning or significance of some event or set of events in a limited context, there appear to be no such limitations in the minds of the philosophers and theologians who speculate on the meaning of history. It is what all history adds up to that they wish to scrutinize, not what was the effect of this happening or that. And this carries with it the consequence that the term "meaning" acquires, as they use it, nuances quite different from those it has in a straightforward historical context. To put the point crudely, to say that history "makes sense" or is meaningful as a whole is, often at any rate, to say that we can feel morally satisfied when we contemplate it. To assert that history fails to make sense is conversely to proclaim that it offends our moral susceptibilities.

The first of these points need not detain us long. To make it we need do no more than refer to the example used above: What was the significance of the career of Stresemann? A student of recent history might ask this question having in mind such problems as these: Was there a real change of heart among German politicians in the inter-war period? If Stresemann's apparent wish to collaborate with Briand was sincere, how widely shared was his outlook at the time? Was there at this period any real chance of genuine Franco-German co-operation on a basis of equality? Two things are at once obvious about these questions. First, that our purpose in asking them is to gain greater insight into the interconnections of the events under examination: we are asking, in effect, whether certain actions were as important as at first sight they seem to be, whether they had the effects they promised to have. This, as I have already said, is a causal enquiry. And secondly that we pursue this enquiry within a context which is strictly limited, that of the political history of Europe in the 20th century. We are not concerned here with what happened in the same region in, say, the 7th century A.D., nor even with what was happening in the Far East at the time. And this is, I think, a feature of historical investigations generally: it is always a stretch of events restricted in time and to some extent also in place of which historians try to make sense. The notion of a period of history is not merely useful for examination purposes: periodisation is an essential part of historical work. And while the beginning and end of an historical period must always be fixed in a more or less arbitrary manner, it remains true that every period must have a beginning and an end.

Contrast now with this the approach of those who hope to see sense or find meaning in history as a whole. On any view their task must be very much harder than that of the everyday historian. Finding unity and connection in a limited group of events is often difficult enough; to seek them in history as a whole seems wildly ambitious. What is more, the very terms in which the problem is posed on this new approach are puzzling. When we ask what was the significance of a specific event or set of events we know that we are to investigate the effects and connections of the events in question; but could any comparable sense be attached to an enquiry into

the significance of history as a whole? "Does this make sense?" asked in history, means roughly, "How does this fit into its context?" Ask the question "Does history make sense?" which eliminates the reference to context, and it is clear that something quite different is being asked.

As a matter of fact those who have asked the question "Does history make sense?" have been concerned with two distinct enquiries. One group of them has sought to discover certain constant factors governing all historical change; they have found the clue to history in race or climate or the development of the forces of production. History on this view would become intelligible if we could show why it took the course it did; the "why" here involved is a causal "why." But other speculative theorists of history have not been content with this comparatively modest programme. They have wanted to find, not merely the factors governing historical change, but rather a single plot or pattern in the whole course of historical development. For them history makes sense only if it can be shown to be going somewhere, and only if the goal in question is something of which we can morally approve.

I shall restrict my comments on the first of these projects, which amounts in effect to an attempt to discover regular patterns or laws operating in history, to two points. First, I want to emphasize, or re-emphasize, that an enquiry of this sort is entirely independent of history proper. It is true that professional historians are generally hostile to the idea of looking for historical laws, but that is because the search is associated in their minds with the notion, which they can scarcely be expected to accept, that history in its present form is radically unsatisfactory and needs to be made truly scientific. Many philosophers of history have been would-be reformers of history (Auguste Comte is only the most striking example), but this has been an accidental rather than an essential feature of their thought. The truth is surely that history as we have it today and a science of laws of history are entirely compatible; the latter would not be history but a branch of sociology. Certainly if such a science were to be successfully developed the fact might well have an effect on the popular estimate of the value of history: advanced thinkers at any rate might come to feel that the historical attitude, with its emphasis on the reconstruction of the agent's thought, was superficial or outmoded in the way that some social workers today feel that the growth of psychology has shown many common ways of thinking to be superficial or outmoded. But this possibility need not be realised: history and meta-history, as it could conveniently be called, might continue to exist side by side, as psychological studies and novels do now.

My second point is that, despite everything that has been said on the subject in the last 200 years, no-one has yet produced a reputable example of an historical law. The instances of supposed laws of history which immediately come to mind—Comte's Law of the Three Stages, Marx's Law of the operation of economic factors in history, Toynbee's Law of Challenge and Response—certainly do not fulfil that description. Not only is it the case that they are isolated generalisations rather than parts of a complex theory in the way that is true of scientific laws proper: even as generalisations they leave much to be desired. The main difficulty is that even those



who produce these laws seem unsure of the circumstances in which they might be expected to apply. To take the case of Marx, on the face of it the most scientifically respectable of these theorists: Marx argued that the development of the forces of production must at a certain point put the existing relations of production out of date, and so lead to fundamental social change. But he never made clear what was to count as a crucial development in the forces of production (or even for that matter what was to be included under the phrase "forces of production"), with the result that Marxists are at a loss to know whether the revolution they have so long prophesied has arrived or is still on its way. That this is not a source of embarrassment to them can be explained only by their treating Marxist theory as revealed dogma rather than empirical hypothesis. A similar trouble arises with some of the "laws" put forward by Toynbee: they are such as might be said with equal justice to apply everywhere and nowhere. If we are followers of Toynbee, we see challenge and response everywhere, as he does. But if we fail to see it, that may not be because we lack sharp eyes, but because the specification of what we are to look for is so vague and imprecise.

The moral overtones which are so characteristic of speculative philosophy of history in its classical form need not be present in an enquiry into the laws governing historical change, which could be conducted in a strictly scientific spirit. It is, however, noteworthy that Marx and Toynbee each give their theories an apocalyptic twist after beginning as sociologists, Marx by making the attainment of the classless communist society the outcome (and, it would seem, the justification) of the class struggle, Toynbee when he asks<sup>7</sup> whether the *raison d'être* of religions is to produce civilizations or whether the "roles" must be "reversed." The question "Does history make sense?"—originally taken to mean "Are there recurrent patterns, and therefore constant factors operating, in history?"—is here transformed into: "Is there a single pattern discernible in history?" And this question is asked, not out of idle curiosity, but because the answer is thought to be morally important. History will make sense, on this view, only if it can be seen as a drama which is morally satisfying. The impetus to think in this way comes from reflection on the miseries and evils of which so much of history appears on the surface to consist: it is felt that these cannot be "pointless," but must serve some good purpose. The task is then to discern this purpose, and show how events in detail contribute towards its accomplishment. The Christian conception of history as a drama proceeding from the Creation through the Incarnation to the Last Judgment, and its secular counterpart, the doctrine of progress, may serve as examples of the type of theory I have in mind.

So much has been said in criticism of the attempts of speculative philosophers to display history as the carrying out of a unitary and morally satisfactory plan that it is unnecessary to add anything on the subject here. Instead of abusing the philosophers in question, I suggest that the time has come to take a closer look at what they are doing. It may be that they have themselves misrepresented their enterprise. Confronted by

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. VII, pp. 420 ff.

the fatal question, "Is what you say *a priori* or empirical?" they have chosen the empirical alternative and claimed that their conclusions rest on fact. But, quite apart from the familiar difficulty that reference to what is the case can never be an adequate ground of a moral conclusion, it is all too clear that their reading of fact is by no means compulsive. The charge that they pick their facts to suit their thesis is hard to avoid: in their work we are apt to find tremendous emphasis laid on certain happenings which fit in conveniently with their theory, whilst others which are less convenient go unmentioned. And when it is suggested that there ought to be a decisive empirical test of a view which claims to be empirical, this is agreed to in theory, but somehow proves to be inapplicable in practice. The sea of fact is apparently so vast that it is always possible to fish up some fact or other to support no matter how extravagant a view.

Ought we then to agree with the common opinion that speculations of this type are purely *a priori*? The trouble is that this interpretation seems no more plausible, for the writers concerned (as the instance of Hegel would show) are certainly not insensitive to, or uninterested in, facts. Perhaps a better way to characterize theories of this sort is as *metaphysical*, provided we take care to explain our use of this somewhat nebulous term. Metaphysics, as I am understanding it here, is to be seen as an attempt to provide a set of principles in the light of which every kind of phenomenon or experience can be understood. These principles are interpretative principles, and each metaphysician can hence be thought of as urging an interpretative scheme or advocating a certain way of looking at things. The world will thus appear differently according to our metaphysical point of view. But metaphysical points of view are not arbitrarily adopted: they are each suggested by certain prominent facts or aspects of facts. And a metaphysician carries conviction not merely in so far as his initial insight is impressive, but also in so far as he succeeds in working it out and applying it. So far then from being disdainful of facts, as they are often said to be, metaphysicians must constantly be preoccupied with them. They must constantly urge us to see facts in a certain light, and assure us that if we look at them thus we really can get them into perspective.

Those who offer metaphysical readings of history are certainly not indifferent to facts; it may well be that their original insight was come by through meditating on what actually happened. But this does not mean that what they say is directly open to empirical confutation. The position seems rather to be that they are putting forward not so much a hypothesis as an interpretative framework; they urge us to see historical events in a certain light, or as something or other. And though it is true that interpretative frameworks of this sort have to be abandoned if the material to which they are applied proves to be too awkward, the difficulty is to prove definitely that this condition has arisen. A man with an *idée fixe* will always contrive to see the facts, no matter what they are, as he wants to see them. To describe Hegel and Toynbee as men with *idéées fixes* is scarcely fair, suggesting as it does that they are blind to and careless about evidence; but there is enough truth in the description to make it instructive.

A purist might say at this point: if the works you are concerned with have the character you ascribe to them, if, that is to say, they are such that they can neither be adequately confirmed nor clearly refuted, what possible value do they have? The answer, I suppose, is that they have, or can have, the value which belongs to any system of metaphysical thought: they can serve to open our eyes to aspects of reality which we had not previously noticed and to clarify our view of what continental writers call the human condition. We need not necessarily be fully persuaded by them for this result to occur. It is easy to find formal difficulties in the work of major metaphysicians like Spinoza or Hegel, but this fact need not prevent our feeling when we read their works that their overall point of view is enlightening and their treatment of details in many respects instructive. What gives value to their writings is that there are moments when we all see the world as they do: metaphysicians differ from ordinary men not in having any unusual insight but rather in the fidelity with which they stick to a single point of view and the persistence with which they work out its conceptual implications. Nor is it a question of one view being true here and another false; in a sense there is truth in every view, though naturally individuals find some more satisfying than others. But perhaps it is better to speak of conviction or the lack of it rather than truth or falsehood in connection with metaphysical systems. A great metaphysician convinces us of the authenticity of his point of view; after reading him we feel that we see the world through fresh eyes. We learn from a metaphysician in something of the way in which we learn from a portrait painter or a philosophical poet.

What holds of metaphysics generally holds also of metaphysical meditations upon history. But if we are to be fair to these the first essential is to be clear about the literary genre to which they belong. In studying Toynbee, for instance, we must realise that, despite his own repeated assertions, he is neither a "Post-Modern Western historian" nor any other sort of historian, and that his main conclusions can neither be established nor refuted by simple historical research. It is true that Toynbee's case is a complicated one, in so far as his enquiry was, as already pointed out, originally sociological,<sup>8</sup> and sociological theses certainly depend upon facts. But even as a sociologist or an "empiricist," as he quaintly calls himself, Toynbee's methods are highly individual: witness his reliance on mythology to establish that the "geneses of civilizations" are "particular beats of a general rhythmical pulsation which runs all through the Universe."<sup>9</sup> Already here we seem to have to do with a personal vision rather than a scientific hypothesis, with the deliverances of a poet or "philosopher-hierophant"

8. See *op. cit.*, Vol. X, pp. 91-98 for Toynbee's own account of the genesis of his problem, which makes it clear that he was led into "a study of the breakdowns and disintegrations of civilizations" through setting out to answer a question "forced upon him by an illuminating multiplication of an originally binocular view of History" (i.e. a comparison of the breakdown of Greek civilization with the breakdown of contemporary Western civilization).

9. *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 205. Compare the immediately preceding discussion, and especially the revealing note about Empedocles on p. 200.

(Toynbee's own description of Spengler) rather than a sober investigator with both feet on the ground. And the impression is confirmed when we observe the remarkable twist given to the *Study* in the last four volumes, where the interest is shifted from establishing laws of history to discovering the meaning of history as a whole, and where the intensely personal character of the whole enterprise is made distressingly evident.<sup>10</sup> The delusion that these last volumes are contributions to history is so easy to avoid that it is astonishing that it should continue to blind Toynbee himself.

What then are we to do about Toynbee? The answer is read him, but read him as one might read a poet or a metaphysician, to see whether his way of looking at the past produces conviction or the reverse. At the lowest estimate this procedure will lead, in a writer of such breadth of knowledge and sweep of vision, to a diminution of parochialism and perhaps, the seeing of hitherto unsuspected connections; at the best it could produce in a sympathetic reader an understanding of the historical process as a whole such as he has derived from no previous writer. But I confess that reading Toynbee has not had this effect in my own case: I incline to rate him as neither a new Vico nor a new Hegel, but rather as another Herbert Spencer.

## PIETER GEYL and ARNOLD TOYNBEE

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PIETER GEYL was born in Holland in 1887. He is Professor of Modern History at Utrecht University and has also taught at the University of London, at Smith College, and at Harvard University. In 1949 he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and in 1954 he delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale. Professor Geyl is a member of the Royal Academy at Amsterdam, a foreign member of the Royal Flemish Academy at Brussels, and a corresponding member of the Royal Historical Society of London. He holds a doctorate from Leyden University and an honorary LL.D. degree from the University of St. Andrews.

Before the war, Geyl was best known for his advocacy of the "Great Netherlands" view of Dutch history. A history from this standpoint began to appear in 1930. Two parts of this work are available in English, *The Revolt of the Netherlands, 1555-1609* and *The Netherlands Divided, 1609-*

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10. In Vol. X the index entries s.v. "Toynbee, Arnold Joseph" take up nearly a whole page.

1648. Since the war, he has been concerned mainly with questions of historiography and the theory of history. Among his best-known later works are *Napoleon: For and Against* (Dutch 1946, English 1949), *Debates with Historians*, and *Use and Abuse of History* (both 1955).

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## Can We Know the Pattern of the Past? – A Debate\*

Geyl: The six volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History* appeared before the war, but it is since the war that the book and the author have become famous. A generation only just recovering from the terrible experiences of the war and already anxious about the future is reading the work in the hope of finding in its pages the answer to its perplexities. It is indeed the author's claim to discover for us, in the at first sight chaotic and confusing spectacle of human history, a pattern, a rhythm.

I am going to be very critical. I am going to attack the method and the system itself. But I should like to say how much the work has impressed me. It is based on a vast learning, it is under the control of a powerful imagination, and it is presented in a vivid, colorful, and, at the same time, supple style.

According to Toynbee, history is enacted within the framework of civilizations, much larger units than are the national states to which the attention of historians has been directed far too exclusively. Of such civilizations he counts twenty-one in the whole of the six thousand years of which we have records.

One of the most essential of his observations is that human activities are governed by a law of challenge and response. It is not easy conditions that bring out the best qualities of the human race; it is obstacles and hardships which are overcome. The best qualities—these are for him the spiritual ones. After the genesis of a civilization, Toynbee sees it grow, that is to say, deal successfully with challenges and thus gaining new ground. There is not, in his view, a predestined end to the growth of any civilization. On this important point his theory differs from that famous book *The Decline of the West* of Spengler, of whose system one is nevertheless reminded when one sees Toynbee emphasizing the independent and organic life of civilizations so much. At any rate according to him, civilizations may go on growing indefinitely. In practice, history shows most

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of them succumbing sooner or later. But if they do succumb it is owing to a failure to respond to a challenge; it is not a matter of iron necessity, it is a matter of human shortcoming.

Once broken down, however (I'm still summarizing Toynbee's system) a civilization is irretrievably doomed. It enters upon a period of disintegration which even the most active, most original, most courageous of its "members" are powerless to stop. The creative personality, or the creative minority, cannot now do any more than fight rearguard actions and put off the evil day without preventing the final catastrophe. "Challenge and response" at this stage become "rout and rally." Instead of differentiation there is standardization, the leading minority becomes a ruling class and the majority a "proletariat." Of course this is not the end of all things. Within the universal church, which is in Toynbee's vision another feature of the disintegration stage, a sect has been forming, and this is the chrysalis from which the new civilization will in due time arise.

Now how has the writer arrived at this scheme of development? If we are to believe him, he has deduced it from his unprejudiced observations of human history. He claims that his method is a strictly empirical one. And, true enough, he begins every one of his arguments by presenting a number of cases or instances by way of illustration. The abundance of his knowledge and the unflagging vigor of his presentation are simply amazing. Nevertheless, there are two points which are of such importance that they should be borne constantly in mind, but which Professor Toynbee doesn't seem to be sufficiently aware of.

He bases an argument on, say, twenty cases selected at random from the histories of all peoples and all centuries. The impression made may be ever so convincing, but the twenty cases are selected cases—selected out of two hundred, or two hundred thousand!

That is the first point, and the second is this: that even the twenty cases selected could most of them be presented in a slightly, or radically, different way, with the result that they would no longer support the argument. An error which I think underlies a good deal of Toynbee's systematizing is the assumption that the historical events or phenomena on which he bases his conclusions are firm and unshakeable data: that the particular significance which he attaches to them in order to bring out their mutual likeness (that likeness by which he wants to establish the rule, or tendency, or law) is inherent in them and indisputable. I grant that comparison, with all due reservations, has its use. Without it no general ideas about history could ever be formed. But to detach, for the purposes of comparison, a historical fact from its own particular and never to be repeated circumstances only too easily leads to violence being done to history. And so there is hardly an incident or a phenomenon quoted by Toynbee to illustrate a particular thesis which does not give rise to qualifications in the reader's mind—if the reader happens to know something about the fact in question.

Take the passage where he advances Holland as a striking instance of a civilization owing its rise to the hard conditions created by the sea. In

doing so he obviously overlooks the fact that the exposed parts of Holland were made inhabitable with the help of people dwelling in easier countries who had awakened to civilization earlier, that the soil of Holland, once the water was tamed, proved excellent, and that her situation was extraordinarily suitable for international commerce. Is it right, one feels impelled to ask, to isolate the hard conditions from among the multifarious complexity of reality, and to suppress the favoring conditions?

Yet it is on the strength of so one-sided an argument that Toynbee propounds the thesis: "The greater the challenge, the greater the stimulus," adding that this seems to be "a law which knows no limits to its validity." We have not, he says, "stumbled upon any palpable limits at any point in our empirical survey so far."

Now I suggest that before speaking of laws and of empiricism, and evoking the methods of science, there ought to be a far stricter examination, in every single case, of cause and effect, there ought to be far more careful elimination, isolation, definition.

Let me add, in fairness to Toynbee, that he does not leave it at the law which I quoted. He feels that he cannot go on raising his challenges indefinitely. We soon find him meditating an "overriding law" to qualify the absolute tenor of the first law. After a dazzling display of further instances he concludes that: "there are challenges of a salutary severity that stimulate the human subject to a creative response: but there are also challenges of an overwhelming severity to which the human subject succumbs." To my mind it is in fact very simple. If I give you a knock on the head it is very likely that your energy will be strongly roused and that you will strike back with vigor. But the knock may be so powerful that you will not have anything to reply, or, (to put it in the style of our author), that the source of your energy will dry up for ever. One need not conduct a learned, allegedly empirical, historical investigation to understand that things are likely to happen in the same fashion in the world of communities. But Toynbee in the end formulates his overriding law very impressively in what he calls "scientific terminology": "The most stimulating challenge is to be found in a mean between a deficiency of severity and an excess of it."

And what next? I should like to ask him. When we try to apply this law—scientifically formulated, if not, I am afraid, scientifically established—we shall first of all discover that in every given historical situation it refers to only one element, one out of many, one which it will prove very ticklish work indeed to abstract from the others. Moreover, is not the thing that matters, to define what is too much and what too little, where lies the golden mean? As to that, the law has nothing to say. That has every time to be defined anew by observation.

I must come straight to the main features of the system. Has Toynbee proved that the histories of civilizations fall into these sharply marked stages of growth and disintegration, separated by breakdown? Has he proved that the work of the creative minds, or of the creative minorities, can be successful only in the first stage and that in the second it is doomed to remain so much fruitless effort?

In my opinion he has not. How do I know that the difference is caused by the triumphant creator acting in a growing society, and the hopelessly struggling one in a society in disintegration? I have not been convinced of the essential difference between the phases of civilization. There are evil tendencies and there are good tendencies simultaneously present at every stage of human history, and the human intellect is not sufficiently comprehensive to weigh them off against each other and to tell, before the event, which is to have the upper hand. As for the theory that the individual leader, or the leading minority, is capable of creative achievement in a growing society only and doomed to disappointment in one that is in disintegration—that theory lapses automatically when the distinction is not admitted in the absolute form in which our author propounds it.

I am glad that you are present here, Toynbee, and going to reply. For this is surely a point of great practical importance. *A Study of History* does not definitely announce ruin as did Spengler's book by its very title. But in more than one passage you give us to understand that Western civilization broke down as long ago as the sixteenth century, as a result of the wars of religion. The last four centuries of our history would thus, according to your system, be one long process of disintegration, with collapse as the evitable end—except for the miracle of a reconversion to the faith of our fathers.

There is no doubt, when we look around us, a great deal to induce gloom. But I do not see any reason why history should be read so as to deepen our sense of uneasiness into a sense of hopelessness. Earlier generations have also had their troubles and have managed to struggle through. There is nothing in history to shake our confidence that the future lies open before us.

Toynbee: Well, the BBC has put on for you a kind of "historians' cricket match." The bowler has just delivered his ball, but, when I have replied to Professor Geyl and we have exchanged some ideas afterwards, it will be for you to judge who got the best of the over. Of course, it wouldn't be worth bothering about that if this were just a personal contest between players. Geyl may bowl Toynbee out, or Toynbee may spoil Geyl's bowling average, and in either case the world won't come to an end. But the fate of the world—the destiny of mankind—is involved in the issue between us about the nature of history; and no doubt it is because this does matter—and matters enormously—not just to the two of us here, but to you and to everybody now alive, and to generations still unborn, that the BBC has arranged this debate between my old friend and colleague, Professor Geyl, and me.

In replying to him now, I am going to concentrate on what, to my mind, are his two main lines of attack. One of his general criticisms is: "Toynbee's view of history induces gloom." The other is: "Toynbee has set himself to do something impossible. He is trying to make sense of human history, and that is beyond the capacity of the human mind." I will pay most attention to this second point, because it is, I am sure, by far the more important of the two.

Let me try to dispose of the "gloom" point first. Suppose my view of



history did point to a gloomy conclusion, what of it? "Gloomy" and "cheerful" are one thing, "true" and "false" quite another.

Professor Geyl has interpreted me right in telling you that I have pretty serious misgivings about the state of the world today. Don't you feel the same misgivings? Doesn't Professor Geyl feel them? That surely goes without saying. But what doesn't go without saying is what we are going to do about it; and here Professor Geyl has been handsome to me in telling you where I stand. He has told you that I disbelieve in predestination and am at the opposite pole, on that supremely important question, from the famous German philosopher Spengler. He has told you that my outlook is the reverse of historical materialism; that, in my view, the process of civilization is one of vanquishing the material problems to grapple with the spiritual ones; that I am a believer in free will; in man's freedom to respond with all his heart and soul and mind when life presents him with a challenge. Well, that is what I do believe. But how, I ask you, can one lift up one's heart and apply one's mind unless one does one's best to find out the relevant facts and to look them in the face?—the formidable facts as well as the encouraging ones.

In the state of the world today, the two really formidable facts, as I see them, are that the other civilizations that we know of have all broken down, and that in our recent history one sees some of those tendencies which, in the histories of the broken-down civilizations, have been the obvious symptoms of breakdown. But what's the moral? Surely not to shy at the facts. Professor Geyl himself admits them. And also, surely, not to be daunted by the "sense of uneasiness" which these formidable facts are bound to give us. "I don't see any reason," said Professor Geyl just now, "why history should be read so as to deepen our sense of uneasiness into a mood of hopelessness." That is a telling criticism of Spengler, who does diagnose that our civilization is doomed, and who has nothing better to suggest than that we should fold our hands and await the inevitable blow of the axe. But that ball doesn't take any wicket, for in my view, as Geyl has told you, uneasiness is a challenging call to action, not a death sentence to paralyse our wills. Thank goodness we do know the fates of other civilizations; such knowledge is a chart that warns us of the reefs ahead. Knowledge can be power and salvation if we have the spirit to use it. There is a famous Greek epigram which runs: "I am the tomb of a shipwrecked sailor, but don't let that frighten you off, brother mariner, from setting sail; because, when we went down, the other ships kept afloat."

"There is nothing in history," said Professor Geyl in his closing sentence, "to shake our confidence that the future lies open before us." Those might have been my own words, but I don't quite see what warrant Professor Geyl has for using them. The best comfort Professor Geyl can give us is: "If we take care not to unnerve ourselves by trying to chart the seas, we may be lucky enough to get by without hitting the rocks." No, I haven't painted him quite black enough, for his view is still gloomier than that. "To make a chart of history," he says, "is a sheer impossibility." Professor Geyl's own chart, you see, is the "perfect and absolute blank" of Lewis Carroll's bellman

who hunted the shark. Geyl, too, has a chart, like Spengler and me. We all of us have one, whether we own up to it or not, and no chart is more than one man's shot at the truth. But surely, of those three, the blank is the most useless and the most dangerous.

Professor Geyl thinks I am a pessimist because I see a way of escape in a reconversion to the faith of our fathers. "This," says Professor Geyl, "is an unnecessarily gloomy view of our situation"—like the old lady who was advised to leave it to Providence and exclaimed: "Oh dear, has it come to that?"

What was our fathers' chart of history? As they saw it, it was a tale told by God, unfolding itself from the Creation through the Fall and the Redemption to the Last Judgment. As Professor Geyl says he sees it, it seems like a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. You may not agree with our fathers' view that history is a revelation of God's providence; but it is a poor exchange, isn't it, to swap their faith for the view that history makes no sense.

Of course, Professor Geyl is no more singular in his view than I am in mine. What one may call the nonsense view of history has been fashionable among Western historians for the last few generations. The odd thing is that some of the holders of this view, I don't know whether I could count Professor Geyl among the number, defend it principally on the ground that it is scientific. Of course, it is only human that historians should have wanted to be scientific in an age when science has been enjoying such prestige. I am, myself, a historian who believes that science has an awful lot to teach us. But how strange to suppose that one is being scientific by despairing of making sense! For what is science? It is only another name for the careful and scrupulous use of the human mind. And, if men despair of reason, they are lost. Nature hasn't given us wings, fur, claws, antennae or elephant's trunks; but she has given us the human intellect—the most effective of all implements, if we are not too timid to use it. And what does this scientific intellect do? It looks at the facts, but it doesn't stop there. It looks at the facts and it tries to make sense of them. It does, you see, the very thing that Professor Geyl takes me to task for trying to do with the facts of history.

Is history really too hard a nut for science to crack? When the human intellect has wrested her secret from physical nature, are we going to sit down under an *ex cathedra* dictum that the ambition to discover the secret of human history will always be bound to end in disappointment? We don't need to be told that Man is a harder—a very much harder—nut than the atom. We have discovered how to split the atom and are in danger of splitting it to our own destruction. By comparison with the science of physics, the science of man is so difficult that our discoveries in the two fields have gone forward at an uneven pace till they have got quite out of step with each other. It is partly this that has got us into our present fix. Is science to shirk trying to do anything about it? "The proper study of mankind is man," says Pope. "The human intellect," sighs Geyl, "is not sufficiently comprehensive."

I say: We can't afford such defeatism; it is unworthy of the greatness of man's mind; and it is refuted by the human mind's past achievements. The mind has won all its great victories by well judged boldness. And today, before our eyes, science is launching a characteristically bold offensive in what is now the key area of the mental battlefield. Why, she has got her nutcrackers round this nut, this human nut, already. One arm of the pincers is the exciting young science of psychology, which is opening out entirely new mental horizons for us, in the very direction in which we are most in need of longer vistas. The other is the forbidding yet rewarding discipline of statistics. Science has set herself now in good earnest to comprehend human nature, and, through understanding, to show it how to master itself and thereby set itself free. Science, so long preoccupied with the riddles of non-human nature, has now joined in the quests of philosophy and religion, and this diversion of her energies has been timely. There is, indeed, no time to be lost. We are in for a life and death struggle. And, at this critical hour, is science to get no support from our professedly scientific historians?

Well, in this "mental fight," I have deliberately risked my neck by putting my own reading of the facts of history on the table. I should never dream of claiming that my particular interpretation is the only one possible. There are, I am sure, many different alternative ways of analysing history, each of which is true in itself and illuminating as far as it goes, just as, in dissecting an organism, you can throw light on its nature by laying bare either the skeleton or the muscles or the nerves or the circulation of the blood. No single one of these dissections tells the whole truth, but each of them reveals a genuine facet of it. I should be well content if it turned out that I had laid bare one genuine facet of history, and even then, I should measure my success by the speed with which my own work in my own line was put out of date by further work by other people in the same field. In the short span of one lifetime, the personal contribution of the individual scholar to the great and growing stream of knowledge can't be more than a tiny pailful. But if he could inspire—or provoke—other scholars to pour in their pailfuls too, well, then he could feel that he had really done his job. And this job of making sense of history is one of the crying needs of our day—I beg of you believe me.

Geyl: Well I must say, Toynbee, that I felt some anxiety while you were pouring out over me this torrent of eloquence, wit and burning conviction, but that was of course what I had to expect from you. And now that is over I'm relieved to feel that I'm still there, and my position untouched.

Professor Toynbee pictures me as one of those men who mistake the courage to see evils for gloom, and who when others sound the call for action take refuge from the dangers of our time in an illusionist optimism. But have I been saying that we are not in danger? And that no action is required? What I have said is that Toynbee's system induces the wrong kind of gloom because it tends to make action seem useless. "But I am a believer in man's free will," Toynbee replies. I know. But nevertheless, his system lays it down that the civilization which has been overtaken by a

breakdown is doomed. Now Toynbee has repeatedly suggested that our Western civilization did suffer a breakdown as long ago as the sixteenth century, and that consequently, try as we may, we cannot avoid disaster. Except in one way, except in case we allow ourselves to be reconverted to the faith of our fathers. And here Toynbee exclaims: "You see, I'm not so gloomy after all." Perhaps not. But if one happens to hold a different opinion both of the efficacy and of the likelihood of application of his particular remedy, one cannot help thinking that Toynbee is but offering us cold comfort. He talks as if we cannot advance matters by "so hotly canvassing and loudly advertising," as he contemptuously puts it, "our political and economic maladies." It is the loss of religious faith that is the deadly danger. To most of us this is indeed condemning all our efforts to futility.

Of course, Toynbee, it is only your picturesque way of putting things when you describe me as one of those historians who cling to the nonsense view of history. Because I cannot accept either your methods or your system it does not follow that to my mind history has no meaning. I do not believe that at any time it will be possible to reduce the past to so rigid a pattern as to enable us to forecast the future—granted. Yet to me, as to you, the greatest function of the historian is to interpret the past—to find sense in it, although at the same time it is the least scientific, the most inevitably subjective of his functions.

I am surprised that you class me with those historians who believe that their view of history rests securely on scientific foundations. In fact it is you who claim to be proceeding on the lines of empiricism towards laws of universal validity, while I have been suggesting that these and other scientific terms which you are fond of using have no real meaning in a historical argument. Even just now, didn't you deduce from the conquest of the mystery of the atom the certainty that man's mind will be able to conquer the mystery of the historical process as well? In my opinion these are fundamentally different propositions.

Let me remind you especially of what I have been saying about the uncertain nature of historical events, and the difficulty of detaching them from their contexts. And also of my contention that the cases and instances strewn over your pages have been arbitrarily selected from an infinite number and therefore haven't that value as evidence which you attach to them.

Toynbee: There can be no doubt that you look upon this last point as an important one, Geyl, because you made it in your opening statement and you've come back to it again. I see what you're getting at. I set out to deal with history in terms of civilizations, of which there are, of course, very few specimens, but in the illustrations I give, and the points I make, I don't confine myself to these rare big fellows, I hop about all over the place, bringing up as illustrations of my points events on a much smaller scale, which to you seem to be chosen arbitrarily, because they're just a few taken out of a large number. They also, as you point out, lend themselves to more interpretations than one. Yes, I think that's fair criticism, and quite telling. In answer I'd say two things. I think, as I said a minute or two ago, the same historical event often can be analyzed legitimately

in a number of different ways, each of which brings out some aspect of historical truth which is true as far as it goes, though not the whole truth. I have myself sometimes made the same historical event do double or treble duty in this way, and I don't think this is a misleading way of using facts. As I've said before, several different dissections can all be correct, each in its own line.

My second point is that I bring in these illustrations taken from the small change of history, not for their own sake but to throw indirect light on the big units, which I call civilizations, which are my main concern. I helped myself out in this way because, in the very early stage in human history in which our generation happens to be living, the number of civilizations that have come into existence up to date is still so small—not more than about twenty, as I make it out.

To take up the case of your own country, Holland, now, which I have used to throw light on the rise of the Egyptian and Semerian civilizations: you challenged my account of Holland's rise to greatness. I found my explanation of it in the stimulus of a hard country. The people of Holland had to wrest the country from the sea and they rose to the occasion. Your criticism is that I've arbitrarily isolated one fact out of several. The Dutch, you say, didn't do it by themselves, they were helped at the start by efficient outsiders, and then the country, when it had been reclaimed, turned out to have a rich soil, as well as a good situation for commerce.

Yes of course, those are also facts of Dutch history, but my answer is that they're not the key facts. If the outsiders that you have in mind are the Romans, well, the benefits of Roman efficiency were not enjoyed by Holland alone; Belgium, France, and England enjoyed them as well. So Holland's Roman apprenticeship won't account for achievements that are special to Holland and that distinguish her with her neighbors. Then the fertile soil and good location: these aren't causes of Holland's great feat of fighting and beating the North Sea, they're effects and rewards of it. It is a case of "to him that hath, shall be given." What the Dutch had, before these other things were given them, was the strength of will to raise their country out of the waters. The terrific challenge of the sea to a country below sea-level is surely the unique and distinguishing feature of Dutch history. With all deference to you, Geyl, as a Netherlander and a historian, I still think I'm right in picking out the response of the people of Holland to this challenge, as being the key to the greatness of your country. I do also think that the case of Holland throws valuable light on the cases of Egypt and Babylonia, two other places where people have had to fight swamp and sea in order to reclaim land, and where this struggle between man and nature has brought to life two out of the twenty or so civilizations known to us.

Of course if one could lay hands on some more civilizations, one might be able to study history on that scale without having to bother about little bits and pieces like Holland and England. I wish I were in that happy position, and if you now, Geyl, would help me by taking up your archaeological spade and unearthing a few more forgotten civilizations for me, I

should be vastly obliged to you. But even if you proved yourself a Layard, Schliemann and Arthur Evans rolled into one, you could only raise my present figure of twenty-one known civilizations to twenty-four, and that of course wouldn't help me to reduce my margin of error appreciably.

To turn for a moment to a different point, I want to correct an impression that I think our listeners may have got, of something else that you were saying just now. Anyway, I got the impression myself that you still thought I claimed to be able to foretell the future from the past, that I'd laid it down that our own civilization was doomed. This is a very important point and I want to make my position on it clear beyond all possibility of mistake. So let me repeat: I don't set up to be a prophet, I don't believe history can be used for telling the world's fortune, I think history can perhaps sometimes show one possibilities or even probabilities, but never certainties. With the awful warning of Spengler's dogmatic determinism before my eyes, I always have been and shall be mighty careful, for my part, to treat the future of our own civilization as an open question—not at all because I'm afraid of committing myself, but because I believe as strongly as you do, Geyl, that it is an open question.

Geyl: Well I'm glad, Toynbee, that you've taken so seriously the objections I've made to the profusion of illustrations from national histories. As to the case of Holland, let me just say that I was not thinking of the Romans only and not even of foreigners primarily. What I meant was that Netherlands civilization did not have its origin or earliest development in the region which was exposed to the struggle with the water, but, on the contrary, this region could be described as a backward part of the Netherlands area as a whole. And as regards the future, in one place of your book you are very near to drawing—as you put it—"the horoscope of our civilization" from the fates of other civilizations, and you suggest repeatedly that we have got into the disintegration stage, which you picture to us so elaborately in your book as leading inevitably to catastrophe. I'm glad to hear now that you did not in fact mean to pass an absolute sentence of death over us.

Toynbee: No, I think we simply don't know. I suppose I must be the last judge of what my own beliefs are.

But now, Geyl, here is a ball I'd like for a change to bowl at you. You've given me an opening by the fair-mindedness and frankness you've shown all through our debate. You've done justice to my contention that while historical facts are in some respects unique, there are other respects in which they belong to a class and are therefore comparable. There is truth, you say, in this, otherwise no general ideas about history could ever be formed, but isolating the comparable elements is ticklish work, I speak with feeling from long experience in trying to do precisely that job. But may there not be a moral in this for you and every other historian as well as for me? May not it mean that we ought all of us to give far more time and far more serious and strenuous thought than many of us have ever given to this job of forming one's general ideas? And there is a previous and, to my mind, more important job to be done before that.

We've first to bring into consciousness our existing ideas and to put these trump cards of ours face upwards on the table. All historians are bound, you see, to have general ideas about history. On this point, every stitch of work they do is so much evidence against them. Without ideas, they couldn't think a thought, speak a sentence or write a line on their subjects. Ideas are the machine tools of the mind, and, wherever you see a thought being thrown out, you may be certain that there is an idea at the back of it. This is so obvious that I find it hard to have patience with historians who boast, as some modern Western historians do, that they keep entirely to the facts of history and don't go in for theories. Why, every so-called fact that they present to you had some pattern of theory behind it. Historians who genuinely believe they have no general ideas about history are, I would suggest to them, simply ignorant of the workings of their own minds, and such willful ignorance is, isn't it, really unpardonable. The intellectual worker who refuses to let himself become aware of the working ideas with which he is operating seems to me to be about as great a criminal as the motorist who first closes his eyes and then steps on the gas. To leave oneself and one's public at the mercy of any fool ideas if they happen to have taken possession of one's unconscious, is surely the height of intellectual irresponsibility.

I believe our listeners would be very much interested to hear what you say about that.

Geyl: This is very simple. I agree with you entirely about the impossibility of allowing, as it used to be put, the facts to speak for themselves, and the historian who imagines that he can rule out theory or, let us say, his own individual mind, his personal view of things in general, seems to me a very uninteresting being, or in the majority of cases, when he is obviously only deluding himself and covering his particular partiality with the great word of objectivity and historical science, a very naive person, and perhaps a very dangerous one.

As a matter of fact this is the spirit in which I have tackled you. When you said that I was an adherent of the nonsense view of history, you were mistaking my position altogether. In my own fashion, when I reject your methods and your conclusions, I am also trying to establish general views about history. Without such views, I know that the records of the past would become utterly chaotic and senseless, and I think I should rather be an astronomer than devote my life to so hopeless and futile a study.

But, to me, one of the great things to realize about history is its infinite complexity, and, when I say infinite, I do mean that not only the number of the phenomena and incidents but often their shadowy and changing nature is such that the attempt to reduce them to a fixed relationship and to a scheme of absolute validity can never lead to anything but disappointment. It is when you present your system in so hard and fast a manner as to seem, at any rate to me, to dictate to the future, that I feel bound to protest, on behalf both of history and of the civilization whose crisis we are both witnessing.

You have twitted me for inviting the world to sail on an unbarted

course. Yet I believe that the sense of history is absolutely indispensable for the life of mankind. I believe with Burckhardt that there is wisdom to be gained from the study of the past, but no definite lessons for the actual problems of the present.

Toynbee: Well there! It looks as if, on this question anyway, our two different approaches have brought us on to something like common ground. If I am right in this, I think it is rather encouraging, for this last issue we were discussing is, I am sure, a fundamental one.

Geyl: Well I see, Toynbee, that our time is up. There are just a few seconds left for me to pay tribute to the courage with which you, as you expressed it yourself, have risked your neck; not by facing me here at the microphone, but by composing the gigantic and impressive scheme of civilizations, which was bound to rouse the skeptics and to be subjected to their criticism. Now I am not such a skeptic as to doubt the rightness of my own position in our debate, but I am one compared with you. Perhaps you will value the assurance from such a one that he himself has found your great work immensely stimulating and that, generally speaking, in the vast enterprise in which we historians are engaged together, daring and imaginative spirits like yourself have an essential function to fulfil.

## ISAIAH BERLIN

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ISAIAH BERLIN was born in 1909 and educated at St. Paul's School, London, and at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He was elected to a Fellowship at All Souls' College, Oxford, in 1932 and became a Lecturer in Philosophy at New College, Oxford, in the same year. He has visited the United States on various occasions since 1949 and has lectured and taught at Harvard and Chicago Universities, and at Bryn Mawr College. Early in 1957 he was appointed Chichele Professor in Social and Political Theory at the University of Oxford. His publications include: *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (1939), *The Hedgehog and the Fox—An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (1953), *Historical Inevitability* (1954) and a selection of the works of eighteenth-century philosophers, *The Age of the Enlightenment* (1956). He has also contributed numerous articles to philosophical, political and historical periodicals.

In the following selections from his essay *Historical Inevitability*, Professor Berlin first considers the view that all that happens in human



history is ultimately "determined" by factors wholly or largely beyond the control of individuals, examining it in relation to ordinary thought and to the practice of working historians. In the second extract, he is concerned with the skeptical thesis that historical judgments are necessarily "subjective" or "relative," with the recommendation, sometimes advanced, that historians should avoid making evaluations and assigning moral responsibility.

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## Determinism, Relativism, and Historical Judgments\*

*Determinism and Moral Responsibility.* The proposition that everything that we do and suffer is part of a fixed pattern; that Laplace's observer (supplied with adequate knowledge of facts and laws) could at any moment of historical time describe correctly every past and future event including those of "inner" life, that is, human thoughts, feelings, acts, and so on, has often been entertained, and different implications have been drawn from it; belief in its truth has dismayed some and inspired others. But whether such determinism is a valid theory or not, it seems clear that acceptance of it does not in fact color the ordinary thoughts of the majority of human beings, nor those of historians, nor even those of natural scientists outside the laboratory. For if it did, the language of the believers would reflect this fact and be very different from that of the rest of us. There is a class of expressions which we constantly use (and can scarcely do without) like "you should not (or need not) have done this"; "why did you make this terrible mistake?"; "I could do it, but I would rather not"; "why did the King of Ruritania abdicate?, because, unlike the King of Abyssinia, he lacked the strength of will to resist"; "must the Commander-in-Chief be quite so stupid?" Expressions of this type plainly involve the notion of more than the merely logical possibility of the realization of alternatives other than those which were in fact realized, namely of differences between situations in which individuals can be reasonably regarded as being responsible for their acts, and those in which they can not. For no one will wish to deny that we do often argue about the best among the possible courses of action open to human beings in the present and past and future, in fiction and in dreams; that historians (and judges and juries) do attempt to establish, as well as they are able, what these possibilities are; that the ways in which these lines are drawn mark the frontiers between reliable

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\*This selection is from *Historical Inevitability*, copyright by Oxford University Press, with whose permission it is here reprinted.

and unreliable history; that what is called realism (as opposed to fancy or ignorance of life or utopian dreams) consists precisely in the placing of what occurred (or might occur) in the context of what could have happened (or could happen), and in the demarcation of this from what could not; that this is all (as I think Sir Lewis Namier once suggested) that the sense of history, in the end, comes to; that upon this capacity all historical (as well as legal) justice depends; that it alone makes possible to speak of criticism, or praise and blame, as just or deserved or absurd or unfair; and that this is the sole and obvious reason why accidents, *force majeure*—being by definition unavoidable—are necessarily outside the category of responsibility and consequently beyond the bounds of criticism, of the attribution of praise and blame. The difference between the expected and the exceptional, the difficult and the easy, the normal and the perverse, rests upon the drawing of these same lines. All this seems too self-evident to argue. It seems superfluous to add that all discussions of historians about whether a given policy could or could not have been prevented, and what view should therefore be taken of the acts and characters of the actors, are intelligible only on the assumption of the reality of human choices. If determinism were a valid theory of human behavior, these distinctions would be as inappropriate as the attribution of moral responsibility to the planetary system or the tissues of a living cell. These categories permeate all that we think and feel so pervasively and universally, that to think them away, and conceive what and how we should be thinking, feeling, and talking without them, or in the framework of their opposites, is psychologically well-nigh impossible—as impracticable as, let us say, to pretend that we live in a world in which space, time, or number in the normal sense no longer exist. We may indeed always argue about specific situations, about whether a given occurrence is best explained as the inevitable effect of antecedent events beyond human control, or on the contrary as due to free human choice; free not merely in the sense that the case would have been altered if we had chosen—tried to act—differently; but that nothing prevented us from so choosing. It may well be that the growth of science and historical knowledge does in fact tend to show—make probable—that much of what was hitherto attributed to the acts of the unfettered wills of individuals can be satisfactorily explained only by the working of other, non-human, impersonal factors; that we have, in our ignorance or vanity, extended the realm of human freedom much too far. Yet the very meaning of such terms as “cause” and “inevitable” depends on the possibility of contrasting them with at least their imaginary opposites. These alternatives may be improbable, but they must at least be conceivable, if only for the purpose of contrasting them with causal necessities and law-observing uniformities. Unless we attach some meaning to the notion of free acts, i.e. acts not wholly determined by antecedent events or by the nature and “dispositional characteristics” of either persons or things, it is difficult to see how we come to distinguish acts to which responsibility is attached from mere segments in a physical, or psychical, or psycho-physical causal chain of events—a distinction signified (even if all particular applica-

tions of it are mistaken) by the cluster of expressions which deal with open alternatives and free choices. Yet it is this distinction that underlines our normal attribution of values, in particular the notion that praise and blame can be just and not merely useful or effective. If the determinist hypothesis were true and adequately accounted for the actual world, there is a clear sense in which (despite all the extraordinary casuistry which has been employed to avoid this conclusion) the notion of human responsibility, as ordinarily understood, would no longer apply to any actual, but only to imaginary or conceivable, states of affairs. I do not here wish to say that determinism is necessarily false, only that we neither speak nor think as if it could be true, and that it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to conceive what our picture of the world would be if we seriously believed it; so that to speak, as some theorists of history (and scientists with a philosophical bent) tend to do, as if one might accept the determinist hypothesis, and yet to continue to think and speak much as we do at present, is to breed intellectual confusion. If the belief in freedom—which rests on the assumption that human beings do occasionally choose, and that their choices are not wholly accounted for by the kind of causal explanations which are accepted in, say, physics or biology—if this is a necessary illusion, it is so deep and so pervasive that it is not felt as such.<sup>1</sup> No doubt we can try to convince ourselves that we are systematically deluded.<sup>2</sup> But unless we attempt to think out the implications of this possibility, and alter our modes of thoughts and speech to allow for it accordingly, this hypothesis remains hollow; that is, we find it impossible even to entertain it seriously, if our behavior is to be taken as evidence of what we can and what we cannot bring ourselves to believe or suppose not merely in theory, but in practice. My submission is that to make a serious attempt to adapt our thoughts and words to the hypothesis of determinism is scarcely feasible, as things are now, and have been within recorded history. The changes involved are too radical; our moral categories are, in the end, not much more flexible than our physical ones; we cannot begin to think out in real terms, to which behavior and speech would correspond, what the universe of the genuine determinist would be like, any more than we can think out, with the minimum of indispensable concrete detail (i.e. begin to imagine) what it would be like to be in a timeless world, or one with a seventeen-dimensional space. Let those who doubt this try for themselves; the sym-

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1. What can and what cannot be done by particular agents in specific circumstances is an empirical question, properly settled, like all such questions by an appeal to experience. If all acts were causally determined by antecedent conditions which were themselves similarly determined, and so on *ad infinitum*, such investigations would rest on an illusion. As rational beings we should, in that case, make an effort to disillusion ourselves—to cast off the spell of appearances; but we should fail. The delusion, if it is one, belongs to the order of what Kant called "empirically real" and "transcendentally ideal." To try to place ourselves outside the categories which govern our empirical ("real") experience is what he rightly regarded as an unintelligible plan of action. This thesis is surely valid, and can be stated without the paraphernalia of the Kantian system.

2. This desperate effort to remain at once within and without the engulfing dream, to say the unsayable, is irresistible to German metaphysicians of a certain type: e.g. Schopenhauer and Vaihinger.

bols with which we think will hardly lend themselves to the experiment; they, in their turn are too deeply involved in our normal view of the world, allowing for every difference of period and clime and culture, to be capable of so violent a break. We can, of course, work out the logical implications of any set of internally consistent premises—logic and mathematics will do any work that is required of them—but this is a very different thing from knowing how the result would look “in practice,” what the concrete innovations are; and, since history is not a deductive science (and even sociology becomes progressively less intelligible as it loses touch with its empirical foundations), such hypotheses, being abstract models, pure and unapplied, will be of little use to students of human life. Hence the ancient controversy between free will and determinism, while it remains a genuine issue for theologians and philosophers, need not trouble the thoughts of those whose concern is with empirical matters—the actual lives of human beings in the space and time of normal experience. For historians determinism is not a serious issue. . . .

*The Possibility of Objective Evaluations.* When everything has been said in favor of attributing responsibility for character and action to natural and institutional causes; when everything possible has been done to correct blind or over-simple interpretations of conduct which fix too much blame on individuals and their free acts; when, in fact, there is strong evidence to show that it was difficult or impossible for men to do otherwise than they did, given their material environment or education or the influence upon them of various “social pressures”; when every relevant psychological and sociological consideration has been taken into account, every impersonal factor given due weight; after “hegemonist,” nationalist, and other historical heresies have been exposed and refuted; after every effort has been made to induce history to aspire, so far as it can without open absurdity, after the pure condition of a science; after all these severities, we continue to praise and to blame. We blame others as we blame ourselves; and the more we know, the more, it may be, we are disposed to blame. Certainly it will surprise us to be told that the better we understand our own actions—our own motives and the circumstances surrounding them—the freer from self-blame we shall inevitably feel. The contrary is surely often true. The more deeply we investigate the course of our own conduct, the more blameworthy our behavior may seem to us to be, the more remorse we may be disposed to feel; and if this holds for ourselves, it is not reasonable to expect us necessarily, and in all cases, to withhold it from others. Our situations may differ from theirs, but not always so widely as to make all comparisons unfair. We ourselves may be accused unjustly, and so become acutely sensitive to the dangers of unjustly blaming others. But because blame can be unjust and the temptation to utter it very strong, it does not follow that it is never just; and because judgments can be based on ignorance, can spring from violent, or perverse, or silly, or shallow, or unfair notions, it does not follow that the opposites of these qualities do not exist at all; that we are mysteriously doomed to a degree of relativism and subjectivism in history, from which we are no less mysteriously free, or at any rate

more free, in our normal daily thought and transactions with one another. Indeed, the major fallacy of this position must by now be too obvious to need pointing out. We are told that we are creatures of nature or environment, or of history, and that this colors our temperament, our judgments, our principles. Every judgment is relative, every evaluation subjective, made what and as it is by the interplay of the factors of its own time and place, individual or collective. But relative to what? Subjective in contrast with what? Involved in some ephemeral pattern as opposed to what conceivable, presumably timeless, independence of such distorting factors? Relative terms (especially pejoratives) need correlatives, or else they turn out to be without meaning themselves, mere gibes, propagandist phrases designed to throw discredit, and not to describe or analyze. We know what we mean by disparaging a judgment or a method as subjective or biased—we mean that proper methods of weighing evidence have been too far ignored: or that what are normally called facts have been overlooked or suppressed or perverted; or that evidence normally accepted as sufficient to account for the acts of one individual or society is, for no good reason, ignored in some other case similar in all relevant respects; or that canons of interpretation are arbitrarily altered from case to case, that is, without consistency or principle; or that we have reasons for thinking that the historian in question wished to establish certain conclusions for reasons other than those justified by the evidence according to canons of valid inference accepted as normal in his day or in ours, and that this has blinded him to the criteria and methods normal in his field for verifying facts and proving conclusions; or all, or any, of these together; or other considerations like them. These are the kinds of ways in which superficiality is, in practice, distinguished from depth, bias from objectivity, perversion of facts from honesty, stupidity from perspicacity, passion and confusion from detachment and lucidity. And if we grasp these rules correctly, we are fully justified in denouncing breaches of them on the part of anyone; why should we not? But, it may be objected, what of words such as we have used so liberally above—"valid," "normal," "proper," "relevant," "perverted," "suppression of facts," "interpretation"—what do they signify? Is the meaning and use of these crucial terms so very fixed and unambiguous? May not that which is thought relevant or convincing in one generation be regarded as irrelevant in the next? What are unquestioned facts to one historian may, often enough, seem merely a suspicious piece of theorizing to another. This is indeed so. Rules for the weighing of evidence do change. The accepted data of one age seem to its remote successors shot through with metaphysical presuppositions so queer as to be scarcely intelligible. All objectivity, we shall again be told, is subjective, is what it is relatively to its own time and place; all veracity, reliability, all the insights and gifts of an intellectually fertile period are such only relatively to their own "climate of opinion"; nothing is eternal, everything flows. Yet frequently as this kind of thing has been said, and plausible as it may seem, it remains in this context mere rhetoric. We do distinguish facts, not indeed from the valuations which enter into their very texture, but from interpretations of

them; the borderline may not be distinct, but if I say that Stalin is dead and General Franco still alive, my statement may be accurate or mistaken, but nobody in his senses could, as words are used, take me to be advancing a theory or an interpretation. But if I say that Stalin exterminated a great many peasant proprietors because in his infancy he had been swaddled by his nurse, and that this made him aggressive, while General Franco has not done so because he did not go through this kind of experience, no one but a very naive student of the social sciences would take me to be claiming to assert a fact, and that, no matter how many times I begin my sentences with the words "It is a fact." And I shall not readily believe you if you tell me that for Thucydides (or even for some Sumerian scribe) no fundamental distinction existed between relatively "hard" facts and relatively "disputable" interpretations. The borderline has, no doubt, always been wide and vague; it may be a shifting frontier, more distinct in some terrains than in others, but unless we know where, within certain limits, it lies, we fail to understand descriptive language altogether. The modes of thought of the ancients or of any cultures remote from our own are comprehensible to us only in the degree to which we share some, at any rate, of their basic categories; and the distinction between fact and theory is basic among these. I may dispute whether a given historian is profound or shallow, objective in his methods and impartial in his judgments, or borne on the wings of some obsessive hypothesis or overpowering emotion: but what I mean by these contrasted terms will not be utterly different for those who disagree with me, else there would be no argument; and will not, if I can claim to decipher texts at all correctly, be so widely different in different cultures and times and places as to make all communication systematically misleading and delusive. "Objective," "true," "fair," are words of large content, their uses are many, their edges often blurred. Ambiguities and confusions are always possible and often dangerous. Nevertheless such terms do possess meanings, which may, indeed, be fluid, but stay within limits recognized by normal usage, and refer to standards commonly accepted by those who work in relevant fields; and that not merely within one generation or society, but across large stretches of time and space. The mere claim that these crucial terms, these concepts or categories or standards, change in meaning or application, is to assume that such changes can to some degree be traced by methods which themselves are *pro tanto* not held liable to such change; for if these change in their turn, then, *ex hypothesi*, they do so in no way discoverable by us.<sup>3</sup> And if not discoverable, then not discountable, and therefore of no use as a stick with which to beat us for our alleged subjectiveness or relativity, our delusions of grandeur and permanence, of the absoluteness of our standards in a world of ceaseless change. Such charges resemble suggestions sometimes

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3. Unless indeed we embark on the extravagant path of formulating and testing the reliability of such methods by methods of methods (at times called the study of methodology), and these by methods of methods of methods; but we shall have to stop somewhere before we lose count of what we are doing; and accept that final stage, willy-nilly, as absolute, the home of "permanent standards."

casually advanced, that life is a dream. We protest that "everything" cannot be a dream, for then, with nothing to contrast with dreams, the notion of a "dream" loses all specific reference. We may be told that we shall have an awakening; that is, have an experience in relation to which the recollection of our present lives will be somewhat as remembered dreams now are, when compared to our normal waking experience at present. That may be true; but as things are, we can have little or no empirical experience for or against this hypothesis. We are offered an analogy one term of which is hidden from our view; and if we are invited, on the strength of it, to discount the reality of our normal waking life, in terms of another form of experience which is literally not describable and not utterable in terms of our daily experience and normal language—an experience of whose criteria for discriminating between realities and dreams we cannot in principle have any inkling—we may reasonably reply that we do not understand what we are asked to do; that the proposal is quite literally meaningless. Indeed, we may advance the old, but nevertheless sound, platitude that one cannot cast doubt on everything at once, for then nothing is more dubious than anything else, and there are no standards of comparison and nothing is altered. So too, and for the same reason, we may reject as empty those general warnings which beg us to remember that all norms and criteria, factual, logical, ethical, political, aesthetic, are hopelessly infected by historical or social or some other kind of conditioning; that all are but temporary makeshifts, none are stable or reliable; for time and chance will bear them all away. But if all judgments are thus infected, there is nothing whereby we can discriminate between various degrees of infection, and if everything is relative, subjective, accidental, biased, nothing can be judged to be more so than anything else. If words like "subjective" and "relative," "prejudiced" and "biased," are terms not of comparison and contrast—do not imply the possibility of their own opposites, of "objective" (or at least "less subjective"), of "unbiased" (or at least "less biased"), what meaning have they for us? To use them in order to refer to everything whatever, to use them as absolute terms, and not as correlatives, is nothing but a rhetorical perversion of their normal sense, a kind of general *memento mori*, an invocation to all of us to remember how weak and ignorant and trivial we are, a stern and virtuous maxim, and merited perhaps, but not a serious doctrine concerned with the question of the attribution of responsibility in history, relevant to any particular group of moralists or statesmen or human beings.

It may, at this stage, be salutary to be reminded once again of the occasions which stimulated respected thinkers to such views. If, moved to indignation by the crudity and lack of scruple of those "ideological" schools of history which, ignoring all that we know about human beings, paint individuals or classes or societies as heroes and villains, wholly white or unimaginably black, other more sensitive and honest historians or philosophers of history protest against this, and warn us about the dangers of moralizing, of applying dogmatic standards, we applaud, we subscribe to the protest, yet we must be on our guard lest we protest too much, and,

on the plea of curbing excesses, use means which promote some of the diseases of which they purport to be the cure. To blame is always to fail in understanding, say the advocates of toleration; to speak of human responsibility, guilt, crime, wickedness, is only a way of saving oneself the effort, the long, patient, subtle, or tedious labor of unravelling the tangled skein of human affairs. It is always open to us, we shall be told, by a feat of imaginative sympathy to place ourselves in the circumstances of an individual or society; if only we take the trouble to "reconstruct" the conditions, the intellectual and social and religious "climate" of another time or place, we shall thereby obtain insight into, or at least a glimpse of, motives and attitudes in terms of which the act we are judging may seem no longer either gratuitous, stupid, wicked, nor, above all, unintelligible. These are proper sentiments. It follows that we must, if we are to judge fairly, have adequate evidence before us; possess sufficient imagination, sufficient sense of how institutions develop, how human beings act and think, to enable us to achieve understanding of times and places and characters and predicaments very unlike our own; not to let ourselves be blinded by prejudice and passion; make every effort to construct cases for those whom we condemn—better cases, as Acton said, than they made or could have made for themselves; not look at the past solely through the eyes of the victors; nor lean over too far towards the vanquished, as if truth and justice were the monopoly of the martyrs and the minorities; and strive to remain fair even to the big battalions. All this cannot be gainsaid; it is true, just, relevant, but perhaps hardly startling. And we can add as a corollary: other times, other standards; nothing is absolute or unchanging; time and chance alter all things; and that too would be a set of truisms. Surely it is not necessary to dramatize these simple truths, which are by now, if anything, too familiar, in order to remember that the purposes, the ultimate ends of life pursued by men, are many, even within one culture and generation; that some of these come into conflict, and lead to clashes between societies, parties, individuals, and not least within individuals themselves; and furthermore that the ends of one age and country differ widely from those of other times and other outlooks. And if we understand how conflicts between ends equally ultimate and sacred, but irreconcilable within the breast of even a single human being, or between different men or groups, can lead to tragic and unavoidable collisions, we shall not distort the moral facts by artificially ordering them in terms of some one absolute criterion; recognize that (*pace* the moralists of the eighteenth century) not all good things are necessarily compatible with one another; and seek to comprehend the changing ideas of cultures, peoples, classes, and individual human beings, without asking which are right, which wrong, at any rate not in terms of some simple home-made dogma. We will not condemn the Middle Ages simply because they fell short of the moral or intellectual standard of the *révolté* intelligentsia of Paris in the eighteenth century, nor denounce these latter, because in their turn they earned the disapprobation of moral bigots in England in the nineteenth, or in America in the twentieth, century. Or if we do condemn societies or individuals,



do so only after taking into account the social and material conditions, the aspirations, codes of value, degree of progress and reaction, measured in terms of their own situation and outlook; and judge them, when we do (and why in the world should we not?), as we judge anyone or anything else, in terms partly of what we like, approve, believe in, and think right ourselves; partly of the views of the societies and individuals in question, and of what we think about such views; and of how far we, being as we are, think it natural or desirable to have a wide variety of views; and of what we think of the importance of motives as against those of consequences, or of the value of consequences as against the quality of motives, and so on. We judge as we judge, we take the risk which this entails, we accept correction wherever this seems valid, we go too far, and under pressure we retract. We make hasty generalizations, we prove mistaken, and if we are honest, we withdraw. We seek to be understanding and just, or we seek to derive practical lessons, or to be amused, and we expose ourselves to praise and blame and criticism and correction and misunderstanding. But in so far as we claim to understand the standards of others, whether members of our own societies or those of distant countries and ages, to grasp what we are told by spokesmen of many different traditions and attitudes, to understand why they think as they think and say what they say, then, so long as these claims are not absurdly false, the "relativism" and "subjectivism" of other civilizations do not preclude us from sharing common assumptions, sufficient for some communication with them, for some degree of understanding and being understood. This common ground is what is correctly called objective—that which enables us to identify other men and other civilizations as human and civilized at all. When this breaks down we do cease to understand, and, *ex hypothesi*, we misjudge; but since by the same hypothesis we cannot be sure how far communication has broken down, how far we are being deluded by historical mirages, we cannot take steps to avert this or discount its consequences. We seek to understand by putting together as much as we can out of the fragments of the past, make out the best, most plausible cases for persons and ages remote or unsympathetic, or for some reason inaccessible, to us; we do our utmost to extend the frontiers of knowledge and imagination; as to what happens beyond all possible frontiers, we cannot tell and consequently cannot care; for it is nothing to us. What we can discern we seek to describe as accurately and fully as possible; as for the darkness which surrounds the field of our vision, it is opaque to us, concerning it our judgments are neither subjective nor objective; what is beyond the horizon of vision cannot disturb us in what we are able to see or seek to know; what we can never know cannot make us doubt or reject that which we do. Some of our judgments are, no doubt, relative and subjective, but others are not; for if none were so, if objectivity were in principle inconceivable, the terms subjective and objective, no longer contrasted, would mean nothing; for all correlatives stand and fall together. So much for the secular argument that we must not judge, lest—all standards being relative—we be judged, with the equally fallacious corollary that no individual in history can

rightly be pronounced innocent or guilty, for the values in terms of which he is so described are subjective, spring from self-interest or a passing phase of a culture or from some other such cause; so that the verdict has no "objective" status and no real authority.

## CHRISTOPHER BLAKE

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### Can History Be Objective?\*

It is frequently argued that written history can never be objective; even if the personal bias of the historian can be overcome (which many doubt), it is still inevitable that what is written must be relative to the tastes, customs and prejudices of the creative moment. At worst, no two historians can agree on what really happened; at best, agreement in one generation fails to survive the next. This argument is sometimes called Historical Scepticism; it is often derived from and expressed in an Idealist metaphysical account of knowledge as process towards the Absolute, with all judgments the products of a developing consciousness which must itself be regarded as part of the historical sequence. But this is not an inseparable part of the argument, which I want rather to consider as creating a typical philosophical problem about which the following questions may be asked:

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(a) What kind of objectivity might be expected of the historian, i.e. in what way can the choice, in this context, between objective and subjective be given a sense?; and (b) Why have so many philosophers and historians found a problem here, i.e. why do we take seriously the suggestion that history might never be objective? I have separated my answers to these questions accordingly, so that in Sections I and II, I consider the sense of the philosophical challenge and thus how it may be met, while in the remaining Sections (III to V) some suggestions about the sources of the philosophical difficulty are made.

## I

The Relativist, or Subjectivist, who raises the issue points first of all to certain characteristics of the historian's practice. Wherever the latter may begin, he is forced to select from the total information present to him in records of all kinds, and however he may explain his choice there must be a personal factor involved. Then, although the historian may claim that his final products must, by the conventions of professional probity, contain a factual and therefore indisputable foundation, this is discounted as a naïve suppression of the possibilities of wilfully slanting one's statements of fact, or of accidental equivocation through the vagueness of ordinary words. Thus Professor H. Butterfield, in the preface to his *Whig Interpretation of History*, may invoke a distinction between "general history" and "historical research," the former alone presupposing "... certain methods of historical organization and inference . . .," only to face a philosophical challenge to show how even the researcher can contrive an objective selection without relying on certain presuppositions purely his own. Or Professor G. N. Clark, in his inaugural lecture on *Historical Scholarship and Historical Thought*, may reassert (p. 20) that "... we must not forget that there are such things as facts. . . . All our knowledge of the past has a hard core of facts, however much it may be concealed by the surrounding pulp of disputable interpretation." Yet Levy-Bruhl (quoted by Professor H. B. Acton<sup>1</sup>) has asked, rhetorically, "Ne sont 'faits' que ceux qui produisent un certain effet de choc?"; i.e. even to employ the term "fact," or "event," is to make a selective, and therefore subjective, move—an estimate of importance. To this Professor Acton himself adds the suggestion that, in the first place, such selection is made by those contemporary with the events themselves, which raises the possibility of a kind of double subjectivity in the material as finally employed. Again Professor Oakeshott (in *Experience and its Modes*, p. 98), using an argument that he applies to activities other than the historian's, asserts roundly: "We know nothing of a course of historical events apart from some system of postulates, . . . What is known is always in terms of what is presupposed"; the point is repeated by him in a review (in the *Philosophical Quarterly*, July, 1952) of Mr. Walsh's recent *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, when he (Oakeshott) says, of the historian, "he is represented as starting from a

1. In "The Philosophy of History," *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, 1939-40.

'bare fact,' whereas it is safe to say that he never does so, because such a starting-place is impossible—he begins with an interpretation, which he reinterprets."

Another form of attack on the objectivity of history appears in Mr. Walsh's own work, and elsewhere. This admits that historical writing is not entirely a creative, and therefore individual, enterprise. It would concede the picture of the historian's task as painted by such practising historians as Butterfield and Clark; but it assumes nevertheless that the same individual element is a bar to objectivity; and the removal of the bar is seen as a problem of practice rather than of principle. It would admit that historians achieve a degree of impartiality, but deny that history is objective because they do not agree completely. Complementarily, it supposes that a goal of complete agreement is feasible—even, indeed, that historians themselves believe in such a goal. Thus Mr. Walsh (*op. cit.* p. 98) points out that there are available "apparently inconsistent versions of the same set of events," and marks the contrast which these make with the historian's claim to give "if not the whole truth . . . at any rate as much of the truth as can now be come by." But do historians ever claim this, even figuratively, or in the declamatory sense used in Courts of Law? However, the philosophical attack does not depend on what historians themselves believe, and the point of it is, I think, summed up in this quotation from Dewey's *Logic* (my own italics): "To be intellectually 'objective' is to *discount and eliminate* merely personal factors in the operations by which a conclusion is reached" (p. 44).

Now I think that these arguments can be met, although in a way other than that suggested by their mode of attack. Let it be noted first that among the working canons of historians are standards for determining the accuracy or reliability of sources—standards which are corporately applied. These have been systematised by pedagogues, though usually with mixed success; but, however difficult it may be for the writers of such treatises to bridge the gap between codified theory and recognised good practice, it is indisputable that standards of intellectual honesty are in practice observed. They are observed by common consent, and, moreover, there is common recognition, in spite of some residual disagreement over detail, where they have been transgressed. In short, there is at least a part, actually a very considerable part, of history which is acceptable to the community of professional historians beyond all question by these standards: to Marxists and to Liberals, to Catholics and to Protestants, to nineteenth-century Germans or to twentieth-century Englishmen.

Now the relevance of this to the philosopher's argument is that, when he denies that history is objective, he cannot be claiming that there is no point in their common subject-matter upon which historians agree. In fact his claim is a peculiar one, for the objectivity which he denies is one that in any case could never be obtained. In either form of attack the philosopher is ultimately relying upon the complaint that written history is not objective because it is relative to the mental climate of an era or to the personal bias of the historian, and yet he pursues the attack by showing this state

of affairs to be irretrievable. It is thus impossible that an objective history in this sense could be written, and from this derives the peculiarity, as well as the force, of the question "Can history be objective?" Standards of appraisal are ruled out of any reply to the question, since being objective is ruled out; for if history cannot be objective as long as it is necessary to select facts, or possible to state them ambiguously or by different locutions, then it never will be. One might say that this brand of philosophical argument shows itself by violating what has recently been christened "the principle of non-vacuous contrast,"<sup>2</sup> i.e. the general requirement that no predicate apply either to everything or to nothing in its universe of discourse, since such a rule of use would be tantamount to no rule at all. If a question is asked that pivots on a choice between alternatives, in this case between objective and subjective, then the question can have meaning only if the choice exists. If the choice is *ab initio* ruled out then the question has no sense.

Those arguments already outlined, either that history is not absolutely objective or that it is not objective at all, illustrate the *impasse* very well. If Professor Oakeshott, or Levy-Bruhl, is cited against objectivity in historical writing, then for such writing to be objective we would have to assume one, and only one, objective selection of facts determined by one, and only one, objective set of presuppositions, the whole being recounted in the one objective choice of words. Yet the arguments of extreme historical scepticism, typified in nineteenth-century post-Hegelianism in Germany, have implied the possible occurrence of a situation as ridiculous as this. In Mr. Walsh's consideration, on the other hand, objectivity is certainly made to appear obtainable, simply as a result of discounting those aspects of historical writing which lack the requisite "indifference to persons and places." This, as was said, is given as a practical matter. Yet an objectivity that required such heroic impartiality as this would inevitably be unobtainable in principle, since anything that did achieve it would no longer be history in any recognizable sense. It is, incidentally, part of the philosophical interest of this problem that we are tempted to approach it as a practical one, and then because we cannot see our way to succeeding we are puzzled.

One of the stock answers to Relativism: roughly, that either Relativism is wrong or, if it is correct, then it is itself only a relative verdict; hints at the peculiarity of a philosophical scepticism of this kind. Thus Professor Knox, in his preface to Collingwood's *Idea of History*, says (p. xvii): "If Hegel's philosophy is due to his own psychological make-up or is a function of conditions, economic or other, prevailing in his own time, the same is true of the historian's own methodology and of any possible standard of criticism. In these circumstances questions of truth and falsity cannot arise." Surely this is the trouble with philosophical arguments directed against the objectivity of history, that in the express terms of the argument questions of objectivity or otherwise cannot arise. The historian's canons of

2. By Mr. C. D. Rollins, in "The Philosophical Denial of Sameness of Meaning," *Analysis*, December, 1950.

regard for the facts, and our everyday ways of assessing objectivity, are both set aside. The *impasse* that results is perhaps best summed up by Max Nordau in *The Interpretation of History* (p. 12), although plainly with a significance not fully intended by the author: "Objective truth is as inaccessible to the writers of history as is Kant's 'Thing-in-Itself' to human knowledge."

## II

In this frustrating situation, it is perhaps advisable to consider the ways in which questions about objectivity are decided in ordinary life. To do this, of course, is not to enumerate sundry tests of objectivity; an attempt to codify rules of use, where by the nature of language no precise rules exist, would be as barren as have been those attempts in the past to codify the historian's accepted ideas about good and bad practice. Rather we should now look for, and study, some typical occurrences of the word.

In the relevant sense where the adjective "objective" is contrasted with "subjective," the following might be representative:

"Government White Papers are notably objective about such things";

"Can one rely on the objectivity of the *Times* these days?";

"Caesar contrived to give a remarkably objective picture of his own campaigns";

"Europe prefers the B.B.C. to 'Voice of America' because it deals more objectively with current affairs"; and

"This is the first objective account of Roosevelt's New Deal to appear in print."

Although making estimates of whether something is objective, or how objective it is, may, as in the case of book reviewers, entail some inside acquaintance with that which is under review, yet the bare meaning of the word can be imparted through certain near-synonyms. Some obvious instances of these would probably come closer than others. It is clear that this meaning is not just respect for the truth, although that is perhaps a necessary condition; it is unlikely, for instance, that a journalist or historian would be considered to write objectively if he falsified grossly, whether or not he did so inadvertently. But what else may be required when objectivity is demanded cannot, I think, be explained without recourse to a synonym—unless we mark the absence of some characteristic, such as bias or tendentiousness.

Now in the making of this last point two others of importance are implicit: that on our ordinary meaning of "objective" it is indeed appropriate to ask of a particular item of historical writing "Is this objective?"; and also that there is a parallel between ascribing objectivity to the historian and ascribing it to the journalist. Taking the latter first: it is, of course, not the case that attaining objectivity involves the historian and the journalist in the exercise of similar skills. But if the critical ascription of objectivity has been learnt with respect to journalism, so that the report of the

strike on page 1 is distinguishable from the editorial comment, then a like distinction could presumably be made, say, between a simple statement of rural wage-levels in eighteenth-century France and a study of the causes of the Revolution of 1789. In each case, being objective entails reporting accurately, together with some vaguer notion of neutrality in the idioms used and in the choice and arrangement of what is said—so that we might wish to say of the whole “No reasonable person would argue with that.” We would invoke what Karl Pearson called—in another context—“the final touchstone of equal validity for all normally constituted minds.” Could there be but one criterion of objectivity, this might be it. Nor, then, could it be objected that concepts like “reasonable” or “normally constituted” begged the question. For such a complaint seems to hold out hopes that the meaning need only be once intuited for it to be pinned down for good. But written or spoken language does not admit such hopes. All that is, indeed can be, said is that to call something objective is to imply that other people—reasonable people, that is—would accept it. To feel that this merely pushes the investigation one place back is to misconstrue, in a potentially calamitous way, the function of an investigation of this kind.

Let us return now to the earlier point, that we can ask of a particular work of history whether it is objective. Does the title-question of this paper now have an answer? Certainly many people—teachers, reviewers and historians themselves—do recognize that some historical work is objective. Thus there is a temptation to say that, provided that it is not asked whether history can be objective in a philosophical sense that *a priori* excludes the possibility, we can give an answer of sorts. The question could be interpreted as asking for guidance, *i.e.* whether it is appropriate to couple this adjective with that noun (*cf.* Can a dog be intelligent?), in which case the answer, according to the above analysis, would be affirmative. Or we might answer: “Well, if you are asking whether *all* history is objective, the reply is No, but if you mean *some* history, obviously Yes.” That is, we would try to take the question at its face-value. But it is extremely questionable whether there could be such a face-value, for even in the most ordinary, non-philosophical, contexts there is something awkward about asking “Can history be objective?” For instance, it would scarcely be appropriate to ask, in any imaginable context, “Can journalism be objective?” Individual works can be objective or not, but there is a feeling of strain in trying to assess the class as a whole. To ask “Can history be objective?” in short, is rather like asking “Can novels be well written?” or “Can anything be known?”

Yet to show this is not to make utter nonsense of the philosophical question. There are undeniable difficulties in taking a reflective view of history, which are emphasised in the arguments that philosophers use to deny its objectivity; these difficulties constitute the subject-matter of the latter parts of this paper, where the sources of the problem are examined. Furthermore, there are difficulties in the ordinary concept of objectivity which, although not directly apparent in philosophical discussion of history, still deserve notice. One of these is the temptation to raise a philosophical

question which is merely a more general form of that posed about history. Thus when the objectivity of something or other is in question, it is easy for one side to say: "But can we never be *really* objective? Surely it is impossible to suppress one's subjective inclinations altogether?" By this road, in fact, might one be seduced into asking "Can journalism be objective?" This general temptation may be at least partly explained later, as may the following usage which seems to be at odds with that analyzed. When referring non-scientifically to science, the latter is often called "objective"; it is clear that a comparison with the subjective is being made, i.e. there is no vacuous contrast, yet it seems hard to imagine how any piece of scientific discourse could ever be regarded as subjective in any sense.

To sum up this paper so far: I hope to have shown that, by asking whether history can be objective, philosophers, and some historians, appear to be raising a pointless question, since their arguments against the possibility seem to constitute a *petitio principii*, and since we can give to the question no alternative recognisable sense. I want to show now that the question, although misleadingly expressed, is far from pointless, since it brings out some important philosophical temptations that arise when we regard history in a speculative way.

### III

When we ask ourselves what it is to have historical knowledge the most obvious, and probably the most influential, source of confusion is an analogy with natural science; and it is plain from the writings of those who criticise the objectivity of history that in many cases a desire to assimilate history to the sciences is one source of their complaint. According to a very general code of epistemological respectability the sciences are beyond reproach; this seems to be so particularly when questions of objectivity are raised, for scientific statements are only too easily pointed out as the very paradigm of impartiality and of indifference to time and place. But history is not a science, and therefore as a paradigm of objectivity for the philosophy of history science just will not do. (The question whether history is a science, and—almost as important—the possible misuse of answers to that question, are examined in Mr. P. Gardiner's recent *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, to which I am in debt.)

Traditionally history was compared with the natural sciences either by subject-matter, wherein some said that they were alike in studying reality and some that they differed in being concerned respectively with men and with inanimate nature, or under the ambiguous notion of method. Occasionally these *differentiae* were thoroughly confused, as in Comte's account of the Social Physics which was to supplant history by right of its "méthode objective." However, if we are to make a comparison that is both unambiguous and philosophically valuable we must abandon these traditional alternatives, and concentrate on a study of the languages which history and the sciences respectively employ. A study of the logic of the sciences—for example, of Physics, which is considered the most mature, and hence



archetypal, science—shows that their ideal structure is that of a formal deductive system. Such an artificial language is built around a logico-mathematical framework, and is consequently possessed of the important characteristics of: (a) conceptual precision; and (b) explicit rules to govern what can and cannot be said in the language and what does and does not contradict in it. I do not want to enter here into the question of the interrelations between these, nor of the reasons why they are regarded as ideally appropriate to what purposes the sciences are designed to fulfil. However, I emphasise that, although what we call the English language is nowadays an amalgam of scientific and unscientific words, the large body of human discourse is and must be utterly lacking in those specialised and restrictive attributes. It possesses a logical structure infinitely more complex than that given in a formal system, and this complexity shows itself in so many directions that the concept of a "logic" of natural, or free, discourse is apt to mislead those who have the structure of formal systems in mind. Now I want to assert categorically that, while there remains an obsolescent tradition whereby history is called a science (*cf.* the German word "Wissenschaft"), the language of the historian is, and again must be, of a natural, and therefore by comparison indeterminate, sort. The ideal scientific statement appears in a closed deductive system, while it is essential to historical writing that it enjoy the fluidity and adaptability of ordinary language—"ordinary" not in the sense of "colloquial" or "plebian," but denoting a manner of stating and arguing that is common both to popular and to professional forms of speech.

If in this way, then, history is not a science, here is at least *prima facie* ground for expecting different standards of objectivity. But to do so is not to suppose a greater probity or self-control on the part of the scientist, nor is it to say that the historian's subject-matter, lying closer to the heart, is more likely to tempt personal feelings to intrude. The fact is simply that the scientist has less scope for variation, and therefore for personal embroidery, because *qua* scientist there is less that he can say. Whether he says *that* so-and-so happened, or *why* it happened, the scientist uses a terminology that is given precisely fixed and officially standardised meaning, and that is at any one moment severely limited in extent—limited, that is, by comparison with the natural language. Thus, when it is said that science is objective attention is being drawn to this fact: that scientists, in cases where they disagree, have at hand clear-cut methods for settling their disputes. Now the same is just not true of historical accounts. The richness of natural language allows, and even encourages, disputes of a kind impossible within a systematised context—not the black-or-white disputes with which the latter is designed to cope, but the possibility of saying the same thing in several ways, or of finding a number of competing explanations, and the impossibility of deciding such a dispute (perhaps between historians) on demonstrably impersonal grounds. And if science is popularly considered objective on account of its freedom from these irresolvable conflicts, then history will necessarily appear subjective by comparison; at the same time the utter lack of analogy, on this sort of basis, between history and science makes such a

comparison irrelevant. Earlier I noted an apparent inconsistency in ordinary usage when science was called objective; it now appears that there are two distinct usages, and that what we mean when we say that science is objective and when we say that history *can be* are two very different things.

Of course this ignores, probably with justification, a peculiarly philosophical sense in which science is sometimes called objective. The etymology of that word seems to associate it with the traditional statements of epistemological dualism, wherein to be objective is to be part of the world of objects, the out-there. This is the context of debate over the location of Primary and Secondary Qualities, and it has persisted in a great deal of contemporary discussion of science. There is a strong Lockean flavour about the way in which it is often still thought to be appropriate to elucidate the distinction between cases like these:

"I say, it's quite warm in here", and

"At point (x, y, z, t) the temperature is 300° A."

The latter is objective: which can mean, perhaps, nothing less innocuous than that it is acceptable to everyone who understands the terminology, while the former need not be. But it can also suggest to some that it represents something spatially independent of the speakers, and hence outside the physical range of their personal feelings.

Nevertheless, what has been said should suffice to refute any explicit comparison, in terms of their relative objectivity, of history with science; unfortunately, however, a great deal of philosophical discussion has apparently relied on the comparison without doing so explicitly. This, I think, is true of Dewey's *Logic*. Here a phrase is used that seems, in the context, importantly ambiguous: "controlled inquiry." This can mean an inquiry that is "logically grounded" so that "individual peculiarities are deliberately precluded from taking effect," which would be an adequate *resumé* of the scientific endeavor for our present purposes. But it is easy to slide, as I think Dewey does, into a vaguer meaning altogether, of any intellectual discipline with a recognizable individuality. Thus the door is opened to admit history as well. A closely analogous ambiguity is perpetrated when Dewey resorts to the terminology of logical theory. In reacting against the suggestion that such controlled inquiries could ever yield more than one right answer, Dewey says: "If the same evidence leads different persons to different conclusions, then either the evidence is only speciously the same, or one conclusion (or both) is wrong" (p. 44). Now if "evidence" is to be understood as "deductive premise" this is trivially true; it is also true, although in a quite dissimilar fashion, of the inductive aspect of science; but as a point about historiography it would be totally incorrect. In offering these quotations from Dewey I believe that they illustrate a common fault, and a common path whereby loose thinking can lead to the analogy between history and the sciences which, I suggest, we want to avoid.

Again stemming from this misconceived analogy with science, there is another dimension to the sceptic's arguments. If personal emphasis and

variety of expression in the history written at any one time argue against historical objectivity, then so too must the fact that history is rewritten for every generation. Although the sciences are likewise being continuously rewritten, the scientist can offer an apparently satisfactory, because impersonal, cause for these changes. Unlike the historian when he rewrites, the scientist does not seem to be in the grip of hidden forces; we do not rewrite Newton's *Principia* to satisfy our social or political interests. On the other hand, we do find his formula for gravitational acceleration inadequate for all our occasions—but we give an apparently objective reason for saying so. But this, surely, is once more a symptom of the effectiveness of those self-imposed rules, for accepting or rejecting explanations, which the scientist alone is able to apply because of the logical nature of his discourse, and which makes science alone “objective” in the sense appealed to. If the fact which is expressed so grandiosely by saying that historical judgments are themselves historically conditioned is offered as a philosophical complaint, then the comparison with science cannot be far away. As we are disturbed by irremovable contemporary disagreements in what historians say, so are we disturbed by their seemingly arbitrary adjustments to yesterday's received interpretations. In either case, it is at least plausible to suppose that we hanker after the clear-cut alternatives that confront scientists in their work.

So it is important to remember that we can admit that standards of historical criticism, and therefore what passes these standards, are in constant flux, without conceding this as a ground for questioning whether history can ever be objective. For to make that concession is to make a concealed shift of meaning, whereby to be objective now means, as it does when applied ordinarily to science, to admit no undecidable disputes. This, as I pointed out, is not what we mean when we ask if this or that piece of historical writing is objective. Indeed, Relativism, once its misappropriation of scientific objectivity is shown up, may be claimed to have indicated obliquely the fundamental truth that history is not a science after all.

Which conclusion has, I think, perhaps not been better expressed than in this remark (quoted by James B. Conant, in *Science and Common Sense*): “History is not a deductive science and there are no rules for detecting fact. There are rules for detecting fiction, but that is a different thing altogether.” Yet I suggest that there is a reluctance to accept this conclusion, or rather what it seems to entail: that there is no ultimate, or timeless, sense in which it can be asked, of any historical account, “Is this what *really* happened?” Any finality in answering all historical questions seems impossible; and the mental dissatisfaction, the feeling of puzzlement, which this conclusion brings appear to be not wholly explicable as the after-effects of realizing that we cannot talk of history as if it were a science. Philosophical doubts about the objectivity of history, in other words, carry more than the force of a contrast with scientific objectivity. Reflection upon what it is to know what actually happened is influenced also by a persistent idea concerning what it is to know the facts—i.e. the fundamentally

erroneous idea that something which is known corresponds to something else which it is known about.

Since this topic has been discussed considerably elsewhere, and since generalized remarks about the function of the fact-stating type of discourse seldom enlighten, I shall be as brief and specific as I can. Thinking about such notions as factual truth seems to be dogged by a certain picture of the things which are said truly somehow mirroring that (the physical aspect of the world) to which they refer. Since this picture can never be made explicit it is merely hinted at by such parallels as mapping, modelling, reflecting—any physical process with the basic characteristic of reproducing a structural form. Somehow we want to think of language as attempting to do this for the world; saying, as it were, is assimilated to naming; the true sentence is the one appropriate arrangement of words, and every fresh piece of knowledge is another building block in the verbal facsimile of the world. Today, Correspondence theories of truth and Relational theories of meaning, both of which assume the appropriateness of the picture, are increasingly discredited (which, of course, is not to say that other theories are being promoted to fill the vacancies); yet certain integral parts of using language—parlances such as “corresponding to the facts,” the look-and-see kind of verification, or the learning process known as ostensive definition—do give continued life and vigour to the idea that we can match up everything we say with the appropriate segment of Reality as one reads, or checks the accuracy of, a map. Philosophical argument which appeals to the picture, no matter how well disguised, is convincing, for this is one of the hardest of philosophical harnesses to discard.

The supposition that this picture influences thinking about historical objectivity would explain much of our puzzlement. If history is viewed as trying to recreate reality on paper then on a strict Correspondence view it must either succeed or fail. There is no place, in a search for knowledge about the past, for a plurality of contending answers. We do not wish to have to contemplate, let alone accept, a number of right answers, since to do so is to subvert the whole picture we have, perhaps unwittingly, adopted of how right answers are arrived at and how they are to be judged. Professor Mandelbaum, in his forthright attack upon Historical Relativism (*The Problem of Historical Knowledge*), illustrates the point, since he avowedly rests his case on a Correspondence theory of truth. He recognizes that scepticism about the historian's ability to yield any objective knowledge of the past is in direct conflict with this theory; thus he brings out into the open the very conflict which makes those of us who do not explicitly embrace a Correspondence theory nevertheless suffer discomfort at the demonstration—which we cannot see how to refute—that the historian's work is conditioned by personality, politics, class or nationality, or the mental climate of his times.

According to Professor Mandelbaum, “. . . it is the property of language to refer to non-linguistic entities,” and among these entities are “concrete facts” which have a definite order in themselves. Thus for the historian

surveying his material there is not the freedom of movement that the Relativist hypothesis requires: "the fact itself leads on to further facts without any intermediation or selection based upon the historian's valuational attitudes, class interests and the like." However, this ultimately leads Professor Mandelbaum to his *reductio ad absurdum*. Since "every recognized historical account is a tissue of facts," all disagreements between historians must be factual disagreements; certainly this follows from such a rigid Realism, but it shows simply that such a Realism leads to a position opposite to but equally untenable with a blanket denial of objectivity. For now there is in acceptable history nothing other than the objective. And the reason for this is that to maintain a Correspondence theory of truth is not to offer an answer (except by way of a rhetorical exercise) to what the Relativists claim. To the philosopher who argues that the historian's search for material is made in accordance with some impermanent interest, of himself or of his period, we should return not a denial of his point but a denial of its alleged epistemological importance. We ought to say not that this is not (in a manner of speaking) what happens in writing history, but that it has nothing whatever to do with the way in which historians credit each other with objectivity and a respect for the facts.

Nor does this exhaust the troubles of the Correspondence view. In this view it becomes significant that the subject-matter of the historian lies in the past. Mr. Gardiner, with his eye especially upon Idealist philosophers of history, has warned against any "bogus mysticism" about the past; but we can reject the Idealist's juggling with our notions of past and present and still feel the force of the ancient philosophical doubt that asks: How can we know that things were as we think they were? (Indeed, how can we know that there was anything at all?) In the Correspondence view objectivity is seen as a one-to-one correlation between the account and the actual event; but what if the actual event is no longer with us? The kind of picture-making of real events that is history must, then, be a representation of a representation. Any prospect of determining the accuracy of the second representation, of making quite sure that the historian has not coloured to his personal taste at the expense of objectivity, seems to be gone. In the Correspondence view, the only kind of verification is by direct confrontation, and with history this is out of the question.

#### IV

We may now consider a fundamental pitfall in the critical philosophy of history, wherein two influences already discussed—the comparison with science, and the Correspondence picture of language—are both to some extent involved. In the first section, I quoted the following from Professor Oakeshott: "He (the historian) is represented as starting from a 'bare fact,' whereas . . . he begins with an interpretation. . . ." Now it would be justifiable, perhaps, to reject this as the merest play upon words, as the abuse of a forensic device. But to do so would ignore the importance of what is indirectly pointed out; that a distinction between a that which is

expected to be objective in history and that which could not be is at least an extremely difficult one to draw. Professor Butterfield separates "general history" and "research," which seems to parallel the almost-traditional terminology (cf. Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*) of "synthetic" and "analytic" history; while Professor Clark relies on the form of distinction which Professor Oakeshott rejects when used by Mr. Walsh. But all of these seem to presuppose the distinction rather than illuminate it; this would be the case, I think, with any attempt to make the distinction, since one would be trying to make a general rule out of a fluid practice realized only in particular instances. Historians and their critics recognize that each individual historical work need not restrict itself to a "scissors-and-paste" technique in order to be objective, for the elusive element of synthesis is essential if history is not always to read like a laundry-list. Yet any attempt to make a general bifurcation of history into its objective and subjective elements is apparently unhelpful, and often runs the risk of allowing philosophical play upon the meanings of words to lead us to the absurd conclusion that, after all, objective history does not exist.

Now, of the kind of distinction that is attempted in these cases two questions may be asked: (a) Why do we think that we can make it?; and (b) Why do we feel that we must make it?

In answering the former, the tendency to assimilate historical narrative to scientific explanations will make plausible a great deal. Although for most purposes it is misleading to consider as in separate compartments scientific theories and the data which they explain or predict, the tendency to do so has at least a partial justification in the logic of science. This logic being what it is—and in a sense that is not true of ordinary discourse it is what we have made it—we can distinguish *explicandum* from *explicans* precisely and unambiguously, so that it is analytically possible to order scientific statements as data, lower-level theories (generalizations), transcendental hypotheses, and so forth. Now some such distinction seems at first sight possible in ordinary speech. It is a fact that the chicken crossed the road, and an explanation that it wanted to reach the other side. But we cannot hope to make this distinction hard and fast. Taking the case of a fact-interpretation distinction: it is clearly possible to find borderline instances which could be decided only by the apparently arbitrary ways in which all questions arising from indeterminate usage are decided in ordinary speech. An example offered by Professor Field<sup>3</sup> shows this: clearly it is a fact that, to the best of our knowledge, Plato visited Syracuse for the first time when he was about forty: but is it fact or interpretation to say that Plato was a pagan because he believed in many gods?

Alfred Sidgwick, in his *Process of Argument*, noted this tendency to hesitate over such a choice. Of the fact-interpretation pair of alternatives he says (p. 14): "Whatever value this division has, it does not enable us to set aside a *distinct* class of 'assertions of fact' as above dispute"; although we may discern, in practice, members of this class, "... to admit

3. In "Some Problems of the Philosophy of History," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1938.

the existence of such cases, or even their frequent occurrence, is a very different thing from specifying exactly what they are." He cites certain borderline cases, such as: Did Byron ill-treat his wife? This, like Professor Field's example, is on the borderline because certain usages that are involved are vague (as, of course, is the notion of a "fact"). Sidgwick proposes as a further reason for rejecting the idea of a definable class of facts the possibility of perceptual error; but this, quite apart from leaning on a fallacious philosophical tradition about what it is to make mistakes in seeing, seems to confuse the separate and distinct difficulties in affirming that a fact is not an interpretation and verifying that it is factually true. The logic of ordinary language, it seems, will account sufficiently for our failure to reproduce for it a distinction which the logic of science admits.

Even now, however, the root of the difficulty over facts and interpretations in history may not have been unearthed. Instead of the fault being simply one of trying to standardize a fluid distinction between facts and interpretations, in order thereby to make a distinction between objective and subjective elements, it may be that it is one of supposing that the *latter* distinction could, or should, be made at all. This, I think, is precisely the matter. The radical fallacy is to suppose that we can talk in the same breath of that which is expected to be objective in history and that which could not be. For this pair of opposites is an illicit pair, conceding and concealing the ambiguity between the unsophisticated and the philosophical uses of "objective." Hence the whole terminology of different but comparable parts, or elements, of history—the objective and the subjective—stems from the original statement of the philosopher's case against objectivity. Even where we are sensitive to the oddity of the question "Can history be objective?" we are tempted to meet this kind of scepticism head-on. Thus the question is taken at its (non-existent) face-value in an attempt to show that there is a part of history that is objective, and hence safe from this attack. To the challenge "What part?" are produced the indubitable, and indubitably present, facts. But this alleged defence, of exposing the factual strands woven into the thread of history, is not merely to mistake the philosophical attack for a straightforward piece of criticism but also to slip into paying the philosopher back in his own debased coin. For it is in the way in which doubt is originally cast upon historical objectivity that lies the origin of the framework of argument which is now being employed. There, objectivity was questioned by showing either that no part, or only some part, of written history could pass the philosopher's test; it is one or other of these forms of attack, based necessarily upon a partition of what is written, that imposes upon later discussion the need to distinguish fact from interpretation. Moreover, this seems to have been done from some prior assumption about how objectivity is assessed.

When we judge something to be objective we are, somehow, assessing it in one piece, as a whole. If we are challenged to explain our judgment we would not point to certain distinguishing marks—an undeniable fact here, a well-documented piece of evidence there. Rather, we would refer to the general tone, or (as I suggested earlier) to the absence of certain

emphases. Thus to talk philosophically about objectivity, as if this were an attribute carried by the "objective parts" of narrative, is to miss an important insight as well as to misdirect discussion in the manner indicated. It is, possibly, to make a concealed identification of the logic of "objective" with that of some other, spuriously analogous, concepts. It may be to assume that to be objective is no more than to show the desired proportion of "truths." Certainly it constitutes an error, as second thoughts will show, and perhaps the most critical one that a study of the roots of the puzzle over objectivity will reveal.

## V

Finally one might observe, in the everyday uses of "objective," certain still unnoticed sources of difficulty. For instance there is an undeniable tendency to employ the word as an encomium; any man's newspaper is usually more objective—to him—than is his neighbour's; the word is used by editorial writers as well as about them, and about reviewers as well as by them. Also the noticeable indeterminacy of the usage has already been remarked, i.e. we cannot say with any precision what an objective account of anything would be like. For both of these reasons there can be in practice many cases where the objectivity of a piece of history is interminably disputed, and the suspicion arises that perhaps we can never hope to settle in favour of any piece of historical writing any such dispute. But to accept this is to return to the irremovable, and therefore self-nullifying, scepticism which is the philosophical temptation, and for which the cure is to remember that, before we started to wonder, we did know how to use the word.



# Explanation and Laws

CARL G. HEMPEL

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## The Function of General Laws in History\*

1. It is a rather widely held opinion that history, in contradistinction to the so-called physical sciences, is concerned with the description of particular events of the past rather than with the search for general laws which might govern those events. As a characterization of the type of

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problem in which some historians are mainly interested, this view probably can not be denied; as a statement of the theoretical function of general laws in scientific historical research, it is certainly unacceptable. The following considerations are an attempt to substantiate this point by showing in some detail that general laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences, that they form an indispensable instrument of historical research, and that they even constitute the common basis of various procedures which are often considered as characteristic of the social in contradistinction to the natural sciences.

By a general law, we shall here understand a statement of universal conditional form which is capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed by suitable empirical findings. The term "law" suggests the idea that the statement in question is actually well confirmed by the relevant evidence available; as this qualification is, in many cases, irrelevant for our purpose, we shall frequently use the term "hypothesis of universal form" or briefly "universal hypothesis" instead of "general law," and state the condition of satisfactory confirmation separately, if necessary. In the context of this paper, a universal hypothesis may be assumed to assert a regularity of the following type: In every case where an event of a specified kind *C* occurs at a certain place and time, an event of a specified kind *E* will occur at a place and time which is related in a specified manner to the place and time of the occurrence of the first event. (The symbols "*C*" and "*E*" have been chosen to suggest the terms "cause" and "effect," which are often, though by no means always, applied to events related by a law of the above kind.)

2.1. The main function of general laws in the natural sciences is to connect events in patterns which are usually referred to as *explanation* and *prediction*.

The explanation of the occurrence of an event of some specific kind *E* at a certain place and time consists, as it is usually expressed, in indicating the causes or determining factors of *E*. Now the assertion that a set of events — say, of the kinds *C*<sub>1</sub>, *C*<sub>2</sub>, . . . , *C*<sub>*n*</sub> — have caused the event to be explained, amounts to the statement that, according to certain general laws, a set of events of the kinds mentioned is regularly accompanied by an event of kind *E*. Thus, the scientific explanation of the event in question consists of

- (1) a set of statements asserting the occurrence of certain events *C*<sub>1</sub>, . . . *C*<sub>*n*</sub> at certain times and places,
- (2) a set of universal hypotheses, such that
  - (a) the statements of both groups are reasonably well confirmed by empirical evidence,
  - (b) from the two groups of statements the sentence asserting the occurrence of event *E* can be logically deduced.

In a physical explanation, group (1) would describe the initial and boundary conditions for the occurrence of the final event; generally, we shall say that group (1) states the *determining conditions* for the event

to be explained, while group (2) contains the general laws on which the explanation is based; they imply the statement that whenever events of the kind described in the first group occur, an event of the kind to be explained will take place.

Illustration: Let the event to be explained consist in the cracking of an automobile radiator during a cold night. The sentences of group (1) may state the following initial and boundary conditions: The car was left in the street all night. Its radiator, which consists of iron, was completely filled with water, and the lid was screwed on tightly. The temperature during the night dropped from 39° F. in the evening to 25° F. in the morning; the air pressure was normal. The bursting pressure of the radiator material is so and so much.—Group (2) would contain empirical laws such as the following: Below 32° F., under normal atmospheric pressure, water freezes. Below 39.2° F., the pressure of a mass of water increases with decreasing temperature, if the volume remains constant or decreases; when the water freezes, the pressure again increases. Finally, this group would have to include a quantitative law concerning the change of pressure of water as a function of its temperature and volume.

From statements of these two kinds, the conclusion that the radiator cracked during the night can be deduced by logical reasoning; an explanation of the considered event has been established.

2.2. It is important to bear in mind that the symbols "*E*," "*C*," "*C*<sub>1</sub>," "*C*<sub>2</sub>," etc., which were used above, stand for kinds or properties of events, not for what is sometimes called individual events. For the object of description and explanation in every branch of empirical science is always the occurrence of an event of a certain *kind* (such as a drop in temperature by 14° F., an eclipse of the moon, a cell-division, an earthquake, an increase in employment, a political assassination) at a given place and time, or in a given empirical object (such as the radiator of a certain car, the planetary system, a specified historical personality, etc.) at a certain time.

What is sometimes called the complete description of an individual event (such as the earthquake of San Francisco in 1906 or the assassination of Julius Caesar) would require a statement of all the properties exhibited by the spatial region or the individual object involved, for the period of time occupied by the event in question. Such a task can never be completely accomplished.

*A fortiori*, it is impossible to explain an individual event in the sense of accounting for *all* its characteristics by means of universal hypotheses, although the explanation of what happened at a specified place and time may gradually be made more and more specific and comprehensive.

But there is no difference, in this respect, between history and the natural sciences: both can give an account of their subject-matter only in terms of general concepts, and history can "grasp the unique individuality" of its objects of study no more and no less than can physics or chemistry.

3. The following points result more or less directly from the above study of scientific explanation and are of special importance for the questions here to be discussed.

3.1. A set of events can be said to have caused the event to be explained only if general laws can be indicated which connect "causes" and "effect" in the manner characterized above.

3.2. No matter whether the cause-effect terminology is used or not, a scientific explanation has been achieved only if empirical laws of the kind mentioned under (2) in 2.1 have been applied.<sup>1</sup>

3.3. The use of universal empirical hypotheses as explanatory principles distinguishes genuine from pseudo-explanation, such as, say, the attempt to account for certain features of organic behavior by reference to an entelechy, for whose functioning no laws are offered, or the explanation of the achievements of a given person in terms of his "mission in history," his "predestined fate," or similar notions. Accounts of this type are based on metaphors rather than laws; they convey pictorial and emotional appeals instead of insight into factual connections; they substitute vague analogies and intuitive "plausibility" for deduction from testable statements and are therefore unacceptable as scientific explanations.

Any explanation of scientific character is amenable to objective checks; these include

(a) an empirical test of the sentences which state the determining conditions;

(b) an empirical test of the universal hypotheses on which the explanation rests;

(c) an investigation of whether the explanation is logically conclusive in the sense that the sentence describing the event to be explained follows from the statements of groups (1) and (2).

4. The function of general laws in *scientific prediction* can now be stated very briefly. Quite generally, prediction in empirical science consists in deriving a statement about a certain future event (for example, the relative position of the planets to the sun, at a future date) from (1) statements describing certain known (past or present) conditions (for example, the positions and momenta of the planets at a past or present moment), and (2) suitable general laws (for example, the laws of celestial mechanics). Thus, the logical structure of a scientific prediction is the same as that of a scientific explanation, which has been described in 2.1. In particular, prediction no less than explanation throughout empirical science involves reference to universal empirical hypotheses.

The customary distinction between explanation and prediction rests mainly on a pragmatical difference between the two: While in the case of

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1. Maurice Mandelbaum, in his generally very clarifying analysis of relevance and causation in history (*The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, New York, 1938, Chaps. 7, 8) seems to hold that there is a difference between the "causal analysis" or "causal explanation" of an event and the establishment of scientific laws governing it in the sense stated above. He argues that "scientific laws can only be formulated on the basis of causal analysis," but that "they are not substitutes for full causal explanations" (p. 238). For the reasons outlined above, this distinction does not appear to be justified: every "causal explanation" is an "explanation by scientific laws"; for in no other way than by reference to empirical laws can the assertion of a causal connection between certain events be scientifically substantiated.

an explanation, the final event is known to have happened, and its determining conditions have to be sought, the situation is reversed in the case of a prediction: here, the initial conditions are given, and their "effect"—which in the typical case, has not yet taken place—is to be determined.

In view of the structural equality of explanation and prediction, it may be said that an explanation as characterized in 2.1 is not complete unless it might as well have functioned as a prediction: If the final event can be derived from the initial conditions and universal hypotheses stated in the explanation, then it might as well have been predicted, before it actually happened, on the basis of a knowledge of the initial conditions and the general laws. Thus, e.g., those initial conditions and general laws which the astronomer would adduce in explanation of a certain eclipse of the sun are such that they might also have served as a sufficient basis for a forecast of the eclipse before it took place.

However, only rarely, if ever, are explanations stated so completely as to exhibit this predictive character (which the test referred to under (c) in 3.3. would serve to reveal). Quite commonly, the explanation offered for the occurrence of an event is incomplete. Thus, we may hear the explanation that a barn burnt down "because" a burning cigarette was dropped in the hay, or that a certain political movement has spectacular success "because" it takes advantage of widespread racial prejudices. Similarly, in the case of the broken radiator, the customary way of formulating an explanation would be restricted to pointing out that the car was left in the cold, and the radiator was filled with water.—In explanatory statements like these, the general laws which confer upon the stated conditions the character of "causes" or "determining factors" are completely omitted (sometimes, perhaps, as a "matter of course"), and, furthermore, the enumeration of the determining conditions of group (1) is incomplete; this is illustrated by the preceding examples, but even by the earlier analysis of the broken-radiator case: as a closer examination would reveal, even that much more detailed statement of determining conditions and universal hypotheses would require amplification in order to serve as a sufficient basis for the deduction of the conclusion that the radiator broke during the night.

In some instances, the incompleteness of a given explanation may be considered as inessential. Thus, e.g., we may feel that the explanation referred to in the last example could be made complete if we so desired; for we have reasons to assume that we know the kind of determining conditions and of general laws which are relevant in this context.

Very frequently, however, we encounter "explanations" whose incompleteness can not simply be dismissed as inessential. The methodological consequences of this situation will be discussed later (especially in 5.3 and 5.4).

5.1. The preceding considerations apply to *explanation in history* as well as in any other branch of empirical science. Historical explanation, too, aims at showing that the event in question was not "a matter of chance," but was to be expected in view of certain antecedent or simul-

taneous conditions. The expectation referred to is not prophecy or divination, but rational scientific anticipation which rests on the assumption of general laws.

If this view is correct, it would seem strange that while most historians do suggest explanations of historical events, many of them deny the possibility of resorting to any general laws in history. It is, however, possible to account for this situation by a closer study of explanation in history, as may become clear in the course of the following analysis.

5.2. In some cases, the universal hypotheses underlying a historical explanation are rather explicitly stated, as is illustrated by the italicized passages in the following attempt to explain the tendency of government agencies to perpetuate themselves and to expand:

As the activities of the government are enlarged, more people develop a vested interest in the continuation and expansion of governmental functions. *People who have jobs do not like to lose them; those who are habituated to certain skills do not welcome change; those who have become accustomed to the exercise of a certain kind of power do not like to relinquish their control—if anything, they want to develop greater power and correspondingly greater prestige. . . .* Thus, government offices and bureaus, once created, in turn institute drives, not only to fortify themselves against assault, but to enlarge the scope of their operations.<sup>2</sup>

Most explanations offered in history or sociology, however, fail to include an explicit statement of the general regularities they presuppose; and there seem to be at least two reasons which account for this:

*First*, the universal hypotheses in question frequently relate to individual or social psychology, which somehow is supposed to be familiar to everybody through his everyday experience; thus, they are tacitly taken for granted. This is a situation quite similar to that characterized in 4.

*Second*, it would often be very difficult to formulate the underlying assumptions explicitly with sufficient precision and at the same time in such a way that they are in agreement with all the relevant empirical evidence available. It is highly instructive, in examining the adequacy of a suggested explanation, to attempt a reconstruction of the universal hypotheses on which it rests. Particularly, such terms as "hence," "therefore," "consequently," "because," "naturally," "obviously," etc., are often indicative of the tacit presupposition of some general law: they are used to tie up the initial conditions with the event to be explained; but that the latter was "naturally" to be expected as "a consequence" of the stated conditions follows only if suitable general laws are presupposed. Consider, for example, the statement that the Dust Bowl farmers migrate to California "because" continual drought and sandstorms render their existence increasingly precarious, and because California seems to them to offer so much better living conditions. This explanation rests on some such universal hypothesis as that populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer

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2. Donald W. McConnell, *Economic Behavior* (New York, 1939), pp. 894-895.

better living conditions. But it would obviously be difficult accurately to state this hypothesis in the form of a general law which is reasonably well confirmed by all the relevant evidence available. Similarly, if a particular revolution is explained by reference to the growing discontent, on the part of a large part of the population, with certain prevailing conditions, it is clear that a general regularity is assumed in this explanation, but we are hardly in a position to state just what extent and what specific form the discontent has to assume, and what the environmental conditions have to be, to bring about a revolution. Analogous remarks apply to all historical explanations in terms of class struggle, economic or geographic conditions, vested interests of certain groups, tendency to conspicuous consumption, etc.: All of them rest on the assumption of universal hypotheses<sup>3</sup> which connect certain characteristics of individual or group life with others; but in many cases, the content of the hypotheses which are tacitly assumed in a given explanation can be reconstructed only quite approximately.

5.3. It might be argued that the phenomena covered by the type of explanation just mentioned are of a statistical character, and that therefore only probability hypotheses need to be assumed in their explanation, so that the question as to the "underlying general laws" would be based on a false premise. And indeed, it seems possible and justifiable to construe certain explanations offered in history as based on the assumption of probability hypotheses rather than of general "deterministic" laws, i.e., laws in the form of universal conditions. This claim may be extended to many of the explanations offered in other fields of empirical science as well. Thus, e.g., if Tommy comes down with the measles two weeks after his brother, and if he has not been in the company of other persons having the measles, we accept the explanation that he caught the disease from his brother. Now, there is a general hypothesis underlying this explanation; but it can hardly be said to be a general law to the effect that any person who has not had the measles before will get them without fail if he stays in the company of somebody else who has the measles; that a contagion will occur can be asserted only with a high probability.

Many an explanation offered in history seems to admit of an analysis of this kind: if fully and explicitly formulated, it would state certain initial conditions, and certain probability hypotheses,<sup>4</sup> such that the occurrence of the event to be explained is made highly probable by the initial condi-

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3. What is sometimes, misleadingly, called an explanation by means of a certain concept is, in empirical science, actually an explanation in terms of *universal hypotheses* containing that concept. "Explanations" involving concepts which do not function in empirically testable hypotheses—such as "entelechy" in biology, "historical destination of a race" or "self-unfolding of absolute reason" in history—are mere metaphors without cognitive content.

4. E. Zilsel, in a very stimulating paper on "Physics and the Problem of Historico-Sociological Laws" (*Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 8, 1941, pp. 567-579), suggests that all specifically historical laws are of a statistical character similar to that of the "macro-laws" in physics. The above remarks, however, are not restricted to specifically historical laws since explanation in history rests to a large extent on non-historical laws (cf. section 8 of this paper).

tions in view of the probability hypotheses. But no matter whether explanations in history be construed as "causal" or as "probabilistic" in character, it remains true that in general the initial conditions and especially the universal hypotheses involved are not clearly indicated, and can not unambiguously be supplemented. (In the case of probability hypotheses, for example, the probability values involved will at best be known quite roughly.)

5.4. What the explanatory analyses of historical events offer is, then, in most cases not an explanation in one of the meanings developed above, but something that might be called an *explanation sketch*. Such a sketch consists of a more or less vague indication of the laws and initial conditions considered as relevant, and it needs "filling out" in order to turn into a full-fledged explanation. This filling-out requires further empirical research, for which the sketch suggests the direction. (Explanation sketches are common also outside of history; many explanations in psychoanalysis, for instance, illustrate this point.)

Obviously, an explanation sketch does not admit of an empirical test to the same extent as does a complete explanation; and yet, there is a difference between a scientifically acceptable explanation sketch and a pseudo-explanation (or a pseudo-explanation sketch). A scientifically acceptable explanation sketch needs to be filled out by more specific statements; but it points into the direction where these statements are to be found; and concrete research may tend to confirm or to infirm those indications; i.e., it may show that the kind of initial conditions suggested are actually relevant; or it may reveal that factors of a quite different nature have to be taken into account in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation.—The filling-out process required by an explanation sketch will, in general, assume the form of a gradually increasing precision of the formulations involved; but at any stage of this process, those formulations will have some empirical import: it will be possible to indicate, at least roughly, what kind of evidence would be relevant in testing them, and what findings would tend to confirm them. In the case of non-empirical explanations or explanation sketches, on the other hand—say, by reference to the historical destination of a certain race, or to a principle of historical justice—the use of empirically meaningless terms makes it impossible even roughly to indicate the type of investigation that would have a bearing upon those formulations, and that might lead to evidence either confirming or infirming the suggested explanation.

5.5. In trying to appraise the soundness of a given explanation, one will first have to attempt to reconstruct as completely as possible the argument constituting the explanation or the explanation sketch. In particular, it is important to realize what the underlying explaining hypotheses are, and to judge of their scope and empirical foundation. A resuscitation of the assumptions buried under the gravestones "hence," "therefore," "because," and the like will often reveal that the explanation offered is poorly founded or downright unacceptable. In many cases, this procedure will bring to light the fallacy of claiming that a large number of details of an event



have been explained when, even on a very liberal interpretation, only some broad characteristics of it have been accounted for. Thus, for example, the geographic or economic conditions under which a group lives may account for certain general features of, say, its art or its moral codes; but to grant this does not mean that the artistic achievements of the group or its system of morals has thus been explained in detail; for this would imply that from a description of the prevalent geographic or economic conditions alone, a detailed account of certain aspects of the cultural life of the group can be deduced by means of specifiable general laws.

A related error consists in singling out one of several important groups of factors which would have to be stated in the initial conditions, and then claiming that the phenomenon in question is "determined" by and thus can be explained in terms of that one group of factors.

Occasionally, the adherents of some particular school of explanation or interpretation in history will adduce, as evidence in favor of their approach, a successful historical prediction which was made by a representative of their school. But though the predictive success of a theory is certainly relevant evidence of its soundness, it is important to make sure that the successful prediction is in fact obtainable by means of the theory in question. It happens sometimes that the prediction is actually an ingenious guess which may have been influenced by the theoretical outlook of its author, but which can not be arrived at by means of his theory alone. Thus, an adherent of a quite metaphysical "theory" of history may have a sound feeling for historical developments and may be able to make correct predictions, which he will even couch in the terminology of his theory, though they could not have been attained by means of it. To guard against such pseudo-confirming cases would be one of the functions of test (c) in 3.3.

6. We have tried to show that in history no less than in any other branch of empirical inquiry, scientific explanation can be achieved only by means of suitable general hypotheses, or by theories, which are bodies of systematically related hypotheses. This thesis is clearly in contrast with the familiar view that genuine explanation in history is obtained by a method which characteristically distinguishes the social from the natural sciences, namely, *the method of empathetic understanding*: The historian, we are told, imagines himself in the place of the persons involved in the events which he wants to explain; he tries to realize as completely as possible the circumstances under which they acted, and the motives which influenced their actions; and by this imaginary self-identification with his heroes, he arrives at an understanding and thus at an adequate explanation of the events with which he is concerned.

This method of empathy is, no doubt, frequently applied by laymen and by experts in history. But it does not in itself constitute an explanation; it rather is essentially a heuristic device; its function is to suggest certain psychological hypotheses which might serve as explanatory principles in the case under consideration. Stated in crude terms, the idea underlying this function is the following: The historian tries to realize how he himself

would act under the given conditions, and under the particular motivations of his heroes; he tentatively generalizes his findings into a general rule and uses the latter as an explanatory principle in accounting for the actions of the persons involved. Now, this procedure may sometimes prove heuristically helpful; but its use does not guarantee the soundness of the historical explanation to which it leads. The latter rather depends upon the factual correctness of the empirical generalizations which the method of understanding may have suggested.

Nor is the use of this method indispensable for historical explanation. A historian may, for example, be incapable of feeling himself into the role of a paranoiac historic personality, and yet he may well be able to explain certain of his actions; notably by reference to the principles of abnormal psychology. Thus, whether the historian is or is not in a position to identify himself with his historical hero, is irrelevant for the correctness of his explanation; what counts, is the soundness of the general hypotheses involved, no matter whether they were suggested by empathy or by a strictly behavioristic procedure. Much of the appeal of the "method of understanding" seems to be due to the fact that it tends to present the phenomena in question as somehow "plausible" or "natural" to us;<sup>5</sup> this is often done by means of attractively worded metaphors. But the kind of "understanding" thus conveyed must clearly be separated from scientific understanding. In history as anywhere else in empirical science, the explanation of a phenomenon consists in subsuming it under general empirical laws; and the criterion of its soundness is not whether it appeals to our imagination, whether it is presented in suggestive analogies, or is otherwise made to appear plausible—all this may occur in pseudo-explanations as well—but exclusively whether it rests on empirically well confirmed assumptions concerning initial conditions and general laws.

7.1. So far, we have discussed the importance of general laws for explanation and prediction, and for so-called understanding in history. Let us now survey more briefly some other procedures of historical research which involve the assumption of universal hypotheses.

Closely related to explanation and understanding is the so-called *interpretation of historical phenomena* in terms of some particular approach or theory. The interpretations which are actually offered in history consist either in subsuming the phenomena in question under a scientific explanation or explanation sketch; or in an attempt to subsume them under some general idea which is not amenable to any empirical test. In the former case, interpretation clearly is explanation by means of universal hypotheses; in the latter, it amounts to a pseudo-explanation which may have emotive appeal and evoke vivid pictorial associations, but which does not further our theoretical understanding of the phenomena under consideration.

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5. For a criticism of this kind of plausibility, cf. Zilsel, *loc. cit.*, pp. 577-578, and sections 7 and 8 in the same author's *Problems of Empiricism*, Vol. II, No. 8, in *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*.

7.2. Analogous remarks apply to the procedure of ascertaining the "meaning" of given historical events; its scientific import consists in determining what other events are relevantly connected with the event in question, be it as "causes," or as "effects"; and the statement of the relevant connections assumes, again, the form of explanations or explanation sketches which involve universal hypotheses; this will be seen more clearly in the subsequent section.

7.3. In the historical explanation of some social institutions great emphasis is laid upon an analysis of the *development* of the institution up to the stage under consideration. Critics of this approach have objected that a mere description of this kind is not a genuine explanation. This argument may be given a slightly different aspect in terms of the preceding reflections: A description of the development of an institution is obviously not simply a statement of *all* the events which temporally preceded it; only those events are meant to be included which are "*relevant*" to the formation of that institution. And whether an event is relevant to that development is not a question of the value attitude of the historian, but an objective question depending upon what is sometimes called a causal analysis of the rise of that institution.<sup>6</sup> Now, the causal analysis of an event consists in establishing an explanation for it, and since this requires reference to general hypotheses, so do assumptions about relevance, and, consequently, so does the adequate analysis of the historical development of an institution.

7.4. Similarly, the use of the notions of *determination* and of *dependence* in the empirical sciences, including history, involves reference to general laws.<sup>7</sup> Thus, e.g., we may say that the pressure of a gas depends upon its temperature and volume, or that temperature and volume determine the pressure, in virtue of Boyle's law. But unless the underlying laws are stated explicitly, the assertion of a relation of dependence or of determination between certain magnitudes or characteristics amounts at best to claiming that they are connected by some unspecified empirical law; and that is a very meager assertion indeed: If, for example, we know only that there is some empirical law connecting two metrical magnitudes (such as length and temperature of a metal bar), we can not even be sure that a change of one of the two will be accompanied by a change of the other (for the

6. See the detailed and clear exposition of this point in M. Mandelbaum's book; Chaps. 6-8.

7. According to Mandelbaum, history, in contra-distinction to the physical sciences, consists "not in the formulation of laws of which the particular case is an instance, but in the description of the events in their actual determining relationships to each other; in seeing events as the products and producers of change" (pp. 13-14). This is essentially a view whose untenability has been pointed out already by Hume; it is the belief that a careful examination of two specific events alone, without any reference to similar cases and to general regularities, can reveal that one of the events produces or determines the other. This thesis does not only run counter to the scientific meaning of the concept of determination which clearly rests on that of general law, but it even fails to provide any objective criteria which would be indicative of the intended relationship of determination or production. Thus, to speak of empirical determination independently of any reference to general laws means to use a metaphor without cognitive content.

law may connect the same value of the "dependent" or "determined" magnitude with different values of the other), but only that with any specific value of one of the variables, there will always be associated one and the same value of the other; and this is obviously much less than most authors mean to assert when they speak of determination or dependence in historical analysis.

Therefore, the sweeping assertion that economic (or geographic, or any other kind of) conditions "determine" the development and change of all other aspects of human society, has explanatory value only in so far as it can be substantiated by explicit laws which state just what kind of change in human culture will regularly follow upon specific changes in the economic (geographic, etc.) conditions. Only the establishment of concrete laws can fill the general thesis with scientific content, make it amenable to empirical tests, and confer upon it an explanatory function. The elaboration of such laws with as much precision as possible seems clearly to be the direction in which progress in scientific explanation and understanding has to be sought.

8. The considerations developed in this paper are entirely neutral with respect to the problem of "*specifically historical laws*": neither do they presuppose a particular way of distinguishing historical from sociological and other laws, nor do they imply or deny the assumption that empirical laws can be found which are historical in some specific sense, and which are well confirmed by empirical evidence.

But it may be worth mentioning here that those universal hypotheses to which historians explicitly or tacitly refer in offering explanations, predictions, interpretations, judgments of relevance, etc., are taken from *various* fields of scientific research, in so far as they are not pre-scientific generalizations of everyday experiences. Many of the universal hypotheses underlying historical explanation, for instance, would commonly be classified as psychological, economical, sociological, and partly perhaps as historical laws; in addition, historical research has frequently to resort to general laws established in physics, chemistry, and biology. Thus, e.g., the explanation of the defeat of an army by reference to lack of food, adverse weather conditions, disease, and the like, is based on a—usually tacit—assumption of such laws. The use of tree rings in dating events in history rests on the application of certain biological regularities. Various methods of testing the authenticity of documents, paintings, coins, etc., make use of physical and chemical theories.

The last two examples illustrate another point which is relevant in this context: Even if a historian should propose to restrict his research to a "*pure description*" of the past, without any attempt at offering explanations, statements about relevance and determination, etc., he would continually have to make use of general laws. For the object of his studies would be the past—forever inaccessible to his direct examination. He would have to establish his knowledge by indirect methods: by the use of universal hypotheses which connect his present data with those past events. This

fact has been obscured partly because some of the regularities involved are so familiar that they are not considered worth mentioning at all; and partly because of the habit of relegating the various hypotheses and theories which are used to ascertain knowledge about past events, to the "auxiliary sciences" of history. Quite probably, some of the historians who tend to minimize, if not to deny, the importance of general laws for history, are actuated by the feeling that only "genuinely historical laws" would be of interest for history. But once it is realized that the discovery of historical laws (in some specified sense of this very vague notion) would not make history methodologically autonomous and independent of the other branches of scientific research, it would seem that the problem of the existence of historical laws ought to lose some of its weight.

The remarks made in this section are but special illustrations of two broader principles of the theory of science: first, the separation of "pure description" and "hypothetical generalization and theory-construction" in empirical science is unwarranted; in the building of scientific knowledge the two are inseparably linked. And, second, it is similarly unwarranted and futile to attempt the demarcation of sharp boundary lines between the different fields of scientific research, and an autonomous development of each of the fields. The necessity, in historical inquiry, to make extensive use of universal hypotheses of which at least the overwhelming majority come from fields of research traditionally distinguished from history is just one of the aspects of what may be called the methodological unity of empirical science.

## MORTON WHITE

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## Historical Explanation\*

Historians and philosophers frequently speak of what they call historical explanations. Some explanations, they say for example, are physical, others chemical, and still others historical. In this paper I shall discuss several questions which arise in connection with the concept *historical explanation*. First I shall consider the view, which is widely held, that a historical explanation is one that involves a reference to the past in a way that distinguishes it from all other kinds of explanations. Stated more concretely, the proposed analysis of historical explanation which I shall criticize is that according to which a historical explanation explains facts prevailing at one time by reference to facts prevailing at an earlier time.<sup>1</sup> I shall try to state this view as clearly as I can and then try to show that it is enticing but incorrect because it prevents us from distinguishing many explanations which we call non-historical from historical explanations. In the remainder of the paper I shall try to show how the problem of analyzing historical explanation is connected with the general problem of analyzing what it means to say that an explanation is of a certain kind. The paper does not present a definition of "historical explanation," but in its attempt to clarify some problems preliminary to the presentation of such a definition it may be regarded as an introduction to a logical analysis of history.

### I

When one distinguishes a physical explanation from a biological explanation, or from a chemical explanation, one has a fixed meaning of the word "explanation" in mind. The physical, chemical, and biological explanations are all regarded as explanations in the same sense of that word. When one goes on to compare historical explanations with these other explanations, the presumption is that the word "explanation" has not shifted in meaning. All these explanations differ only in being different kinds of causal explanations.

There are occasions, of course, on which the question "Why?", especially when asked of a moral agent, will receive an answer that is not causal in nature. If Brutus had been asked why he stabbed Caesar he might well have replied by presenting a moral argument, in which case he would have been *defending* his *decision* to stab Caesar and not presenting its cause or the cause of his action. However, such an explanation is offered, not by the historian, but by the historical personage himself. When the historian

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\*This article is reprinted with the permission of the author and the editor of *Mind*, where it was first published in 1943.

1. Thus, Prof. Hugh Miller in his *History and Science* (Berkeley, 1939) says: "a genetic science is one which understands the present in the light of the past" (p. 21).

reports this argument or tries to answer the question "Why did the stabbing of Caesar take place?" or "Why was Caesar stabbed?" he does something different from what Brutus does in his own defense. The report of the moral argument which Brutus might have given in favor of the rightness of his *decision* to stab Caesar may still leave open the question of why the stabbing took place. Many people decide that an *actio* is the right one to perform without successfully performing it. A decision is not usually sufficient for bringing about an intended action. Even after we report the chain of argumentation by which President Truman defended his conclusion that the atomic bomb ought to have been dropped, we can ask why the bomb was actually dropped, recognizing as we should that Truman's decision itself was not enough to bring about the action. In reply to such a question one would offer a causal explanation of the action, citing Truman's decision along with relevant circumstances and conditions. One might also offer a causal explanation of Truman's decision after Truman's moral argument had been reported, on the correct theory that decisions are not always causally explained merely by reciting the arguments used by those who decide.

Because the primary concern of the present paper is with causal explanation in history, I shall begin with a brief analysis of causal explanation presented by Carl G. Hempel:

The explanation of the occurrence of an event of some specific kind *E* at a certain place and time consists, as it is usually expressed, in indicating the causes or determining factors of *E*. Now the assertion that a set of events—say, of the kinds  $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ —have caused the event to be explained, amounts to the statement that, according to certain general laws, a set of events of the kinds mentioned is regularly accompanied by an event of the kind *E*. Thus, the scientific explanation of the event in question consists of (1) a set of statements asserting the occurrence of certain events  $C_1, \dots, C_n$  at certain times and places, (2) a set of universal hypotheses, such that (a) the statements of both groups are reasonably well confirmed by empirical evidence, (b) from the two groups of statements the sentence asserting the occurrence of event *E* can be logically deduced.<sup>2</sup>

As an illustration, consider the following. Someone discovers that the part of Fifth Avenue, New York City, lying between 42nd and 43rd Streets ("f" for short) is wet at 4 P.M., April 1, 1942. He asks why, and is given the answer: "Because *f* was rained on at 3.59 P.M., April 1, 1942." The universal hypothesis which, in conjunction with the second singular statement, permits the deduction of the statement designating the explained fact, is: If any object is rained on at time *t*, then it will be wet one minute after *t*. Put schematically, using "*W*" as the name of the relation expressed by the formula "*x* is wet at time *t*," and "*R*" as the name of the relation expressed by the formula "*x* is rained on at time *t*," we have the following deductive argument.

2. C. G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 39, p. 36 (1942). Reprinted in the present volume, p. 344, above.

1.  $f$  R 3:59 P.M., April 1, 1942.

2. For every  $x$  and for every  $t$ , if  $x$  R  $t$ , then  $x$  W one minute after  $t$ .  
Therefore,

3.  $f$  W 4 P.M., April 1, 1942.

The structure of this explanation is fairly clear. The first statement asserts that a certain material object has a certain relation to a certain date. The second asserts that if an object has a certain relation to a certain date, then that object will have another relation to another date. Not all explanations fall into this pattern; but this is a very common sub-class of the class of explanations. I choose it both because of its simplicity and because it is an explanation in which a fact prevailing at one time is explained in terms of a fact prevailing at an earlier time. So far as I am able to discover, this explanation furnishes us with the pattern for what some people call historical explanations. Let us compare it with an explanation which would not be called historical on this view.

Consider the kind of explanation in which the fact explained is designated by a statement of the form  $x$  is  $P$ . For want of a more interesting example at the moment, consider the statement " $a$  is mortal," where " $a$ " names some entity. Suppose someone should ask: "Why is  $a$  mortal?" and that someone else should reply: "Because  $a$  is a man." The scheme of this explanation is:

1.  $a$  is a man.

2. For every  $x$ , if  $x$  is a man, then  $x$  is mortal.

Therefore,

3.  $a$  is mortal.

The two explanations we have considered differ in at least one very important respect. The first can be described as an explanation in which a fact prevailing at one time is explained by reference to a fact prevailing at an earlier time. The fact that  $f$  is rained on at 3:59 may be said to be earlier than the fact that it is wet at 4. The second explanation cannot be described in this way. The fact that  $a$  is a man is no earlier than the fact that  $a$  is mortal. The main difference between both explanations depends upon the difference between the generalizations that guide them. In the case of the illustration about Fifth Avenue, a generalization is involved which refers to a date  $t$  in its antecedent, whereas the consequent contains a reference to a date later than  $t$  by some fixed amount of time. This is not true of the second illustration.

It must not be inferred that the difference between the first and second illustrations depends solely on the fact that the singular statements in the first express relations between objects and dates, or on the fact that the generalization which guides the first contains a time-variable explicitly.<sup>3</sup> For

3. E. Zilsel, in his paper "Physics and the Problem of Historico-sociological Laws," *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 8, pp. 573 ff. (1941), distinguishes between what he calls temporal laws and simultaneity-laws by saying that the former contain time-variables explicitly, whereas the latter do not. My point is that there are laws which contain the time-variable explicitly, and which would not be called "temporal," i.e. would not be said to connect facts prevailing at different times. They could be what Zilsel calls "simultaneity laws" and still contain the time-variable explicitly.



the following case provides a good counter-example. Let us assume that the statement, "Whenever Chinese eat, they eat with chopsticks" is true. Now suppose I ask why Chiang is eating with chopsticks at 7 P.M., May 1, 1942, and this is explained as follows:

1. Chiang is Chinese and Chiang is eating at 7.

2. For every  $x$  and for every  $t$ , if  $x$  is Chinese and  $x$  is eating at  $t$ , then  $x$  is eating with chopsticks at  $t$ .

Therefore,

3. Chiang is eating with chopsticks at 7.

This is an explanation in which the singular statements take the form  $x R t$ , and yet one which would not be called an explanation which explains a fact prevailing at one time by reference to an earlier fact. Clearly, the fact that Chiang is a Chinese who is eating at 7 is no earlier than the fact that he eats with chopsticks at 7. The point to be stressed is that the generalization immediately above is not one which refers to *different* dates in its antecedent and consequent.<sup>4</sup>

Having interpreted the view as I have, I shall now state my objection to it. The point is that there are explanations which would be called physical, others which would be called chemical, and others which would be called biological, all of which must be called historical on the view. For instance, if one explains the present relative positions of the sun, the moon, and the earth by reference to their relative positions one year ago, one is giving a *historical* explanation on the view under consideration. Obviously the statement of their positions one year ago expresses a fact earlier than the one which expresses their present positions. Furthermore, the laws of mechanics, which figure in the explanation, connect facts prevailing at different times. But we do not want our analysis to result in the statement that one explanation is both mechanical and historical. One of the conditions we impose on our analysis is that it permit us to deny this possibility. In other words, we are assuming that the phrase "historical explanation" is so used that we cannot say of an explanation, without impropriety, that it is both physical and historical. It is not my intention to deny that one could use the phrase "historical explanation" so that historical explanations (in this arbitrary sense) would turn up in all sciences. No doubt the kind of explanation that explains present facts by referring to past facts (in the above sense) is an interesting kind, and one that does appear in all the sciences. But if we are interested in analyzing what historians mean by the phrase "historical explanation," we should do well to assign another name to the class of explanations that explain present facts in terms of past facts.

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4. I have, in the above, formulated as clearly as I can, the view that a historical explanation is one that explains the present in terms of the past. One of the conditions which guided my interpretation is that the holders of this view want to distinguish historical explanations from other kinds. In the light of this they could not have in mind the sense in which *all* explanations explain the present in terms of the past. I have in mind the fact that every explanation presupposes a generalization, and that every generalization is dependent for its verification upon some facts which are past. If they had meant this by the phrase "explain the present in terms of the past, or by reference to the past," they would have to call *all* explanations historical, and surely this is not their intention.

Although we have rejected one analysis of the phrase "historical explanation," we have not thereby destroyed the possibility of its having another meaning. Indeed, we have implied that it does. But since we have tried to show that explaining present facts by means of past facts does not distinguish historical explanations from others, we must have some general idea of the criteria which serve to distinguish different kinds of explanations from each other. The next part of this paper, therefore, will be devoted to an analysis of what it means to say that one explanation is different in kind from another.

## II

An explanation, we have seen, is a constellation of statements. We have also seen that some explanations are said to be different in kind from others; some are said to be physical, others chemical, and others historical. If we believe that the terms "physical" and "chemical" are on a par with the term "historical" when all these are applied to explanations, then the general method we use in distinguishing a chemical explanation from a physical explanation is the one we use in order to distinguish a historical explanation from other kinds of explanations. The problem, if it is conceived in this way, involves a consideration of the relation between an explanation and the discipline in which it is an explanation. When we say that a given explanation *e* is a physical explanation, and that another, *f*, is a chemical explanation, both of these statements may be regarded as instances of the statement form: *x* is an explanation of *S*, where for "*x*" we put names of particular explanations, and for "*S*" the names of sciences.

Normally a biologist who has discovered a certain singular biological fact looks to the laws of biology and to other biological facts for his explanation. In such a case the statement expressing the fact to be explained is a biological statement, so is the generalization that guides the explanation, and so is the statement expressing the so-called initial condition. Here we would say that the biologist is presenting a biological explanation, the reason being that every statement in the explanation is a biological truth. We define a biological explanation, therefore, as an explanation everyone of whose constituent statements is a biological truth. And the definition may be generalized, so that to say that *x* is an explanation of kind *S* is to say that every statement of *x* is a truth of *S*. If we push the analysis further we have to ask what it means to say that a given statement is a truth of *S*.

J. H. Woodger has presented a rigorous formalization of a part of biology which permits us to discuss this question in a concrete way.<sup>5</sup> He presents, in his monograph, *The Technique of Theory Construction*, a sample biological theory which he calls *T*. *T*, of course, does not include all of biology; it is only a part of biology. From a methodological point of view, however, it serves our purpose, since it serves to elicit the points we

5. J. H. Woodger, *The Axiomatic Method in Biology* (Cambridge, 1937); also a monograph, *The Technique of Theory Construction*, *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, Vol. 2, no. 5 (Chicago, 1939).

have in mind. At first, the consideration of this theory may seem colossally irrelevant to the problem of historical explanation. Later, it is to be hoped, its relevance will be obvious.

The first point of significance is the distinction Woodger makes between two kinds of constants.<sup>6</sup> Constants are either (a) logical constants or (b) subject-matter or descriptive constants. The logical constants—those like “not,” “and,” “or,” “some,” and “all”—are those which appear in every scientific theory, and not only in the specifically biological theory *T*. The subject-matter constants of the theory are “*P*,” “*T*,” and “cell.” “*P*” denotes the relation *part of*, “*T*” the relation *before in time*, and “cell” denotes the class of biological cells. All the signs other than these three which appear in the theory *T* are either logical constants, variables, or subject-matter constants which can be defined with the help of the three primitives, logical constants, and variables.

After specifying the various ways in which statements may be formed in this theory, Woodger goes on to set up a list of statements which he calls Part I of the theory *T*. These are all logical truths—statements from the calculus of propositions, the calculus of classes, the calculus of binary relations, etc.—which figure in the proofs to be made later on. It turns out, then, that Woodger’s biological theory *T* contains one part comprising only logical truths. Logic, it is then said, is a discipline which precedes the specifically biological part of the theory. To say that logic precedes or that it is presupposed means that “all expressions and laws of logic are treated on an equal footing with the primitive terms and axioms of the discipline under construction; the logical terms are used in the formulation of the axioms, theorems and definitions, for instance, without an explanation of their meaning, and the logical laws are applied in proofs without first establishing their validity.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, we see that in so far as some logical truths appear in Woodger’s theory *T* there are some truths in it which are not *specific* to *T*.

The important point is that every theory can have its statements divided into two classes—those which are statements of the disciplines presupposed by the theory, and those which are specific to the theory. In the case of Woodger’s theory, Part I is said to contain all and only those statements coming from theories presupposed by *T*, whereas Part II is said to contain all and only those which are specific to *T*. If we regard all statements, regardless of whether they fall into Part I or Part II as statements of *T*, we construe the notion of a statement of *T* in a wide sense. Not only those statements which we normally regard as statements of the science are said to be statements of the science, but also those which come from sciences presupposed by the science. In order to avoid ambiguity, we shall hereafter distinguish carefully between a statement of *S* and one which is specifically of *S*.

If we return now to the problem that turned our attention to Woodger’s

6. This familiar distinction is drawn in Alfred Tarski’s *Introduction to Logic* (p. 18). Woodger’s discussion involves an application of this point to a concrete, simple example.

7. Tarski, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

theory, we must revise our definition of an explanation of *S*. We said, it will be recalled, that an explanation of *S* is an explanation every one of whose constituent statements is a truth of *S*. We should revise that to read that it is an explanation every one of whose constituent statements is *specifically* a truth of *S*.<sup>8</sup> What, now, is such a truth? It is one that contains some specific terms of *S* in an essential way.<sup>9</sup> On Woodger's analysis, the statement that the relation *P* is transitive seems to be regarded as a truth which is specifically of *T*<sup>10</sup> because it contains at least one subject-matter constant of *T* in an essential way. I have included the condition that the statement contain subject-matter constants in an *essential* way in order to prevent statements like "Whatever is a cell is a cell" from being specifically of *T*. In this statement the constant "cell" appears, but it does not appear essentially, *i.e.* any other word which could, with grammatical correctness, be put in place of "cell" would leave the statement thus formed true. On the other hand, this is not so in the case of the statement "*P* is transitive," since there are some replacements for "*P*" which would yield a falsehood. Thus, there are two conditions that a truth which is specifically of *T* must satisfy: (1) it must contain terms specifically of *T*, and (2) these terms must occur essentially in some places.<sup>11</sup> And, in general, whether an explanation is to be called *historical* depends on whether it contains specifically *historical* terms in an essential way.

We have, in what may seem to be a very roundabout way, reached one of the most serious problems of the paper. Are there any specifically historical terms? If there are, what are they?

### III

Before going on to the direct consideration of these questions, it is necessary to make a few more general observations.

Because logical constants are used in the formulation of statements in Woodger's theory *T*, and because logical laws are used in making deductions in the theory, logic is said to be a discipline which precedes or which

8. It should be noted that Hempel's definition of "explanation," which we have adopted, excludes logical truths from the class of statements constituting an explanation. If it did not, our class of explanations, *i.e.* the class of *S*-ical explanations, where "*S*" took as substituends the initial fragments of names of empirical sciences, would be empty. This would be the case because some logical truths would always figure as premises of deductions, and their presence would assure the presence of some truths not specifically *S*-ical.

9. It is very important to remember that "*S*" can take as substituends only the names of *empirical* sciences. The definition would fail in the case of specifically logical truths. It is not true to say that a specifically logical truth is the same as a truth that contains some specifically logical terms in an essential way. All statements contain some specifically logical terms in an essential way.

10. Below we shall consider the question whether Woodger would be right, from our point of view, in saying that this statement is specific to *T*.

11. For a detailed analysis of the notion of the essential occurrence of a term, see W. V. Quine, "Truth by Convention," *Philosophical Essays for Alfred North Whitehead*, reprinted in H. Feigl and W. Sellars (eds.), *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*.

is presupposed by this small part of biology. It should not be thought, however, that logic is the only discipline that an empirical science can presuppose, even though logic is presupposed by every empirical science. A given empirical science may presuppose, in addition to logic, other empirical sciences. This fact is even demonstrated by Woodger's theory *T*.

Although Woodger makes only a bipartite distinction between the constants which figure in his theory—between those which are logical, and those which are descriptive—it is possible to make a tripartite distinction if one thinks of the number of disciplines whose terms are involved in his small theory *T*. It will be recalled that Woodger listed three signs as his subject-matter constants, without making any distinction between them. One was "*P*," denoting the relation *spatial part of*, the second was "*T*" denoting the relation *before in time*, and the third was "cell," denoting the class of cells, in the biological sense. An examination of these three constants will show that the first two are distinctly different from the last in a certain respect. The expressions "is a spatial part of," and "is before in time," appear in many scientific discussions which do not deal with biological matters. They are terms that are not specific to biology, and therefore not specific to the small part of biology which Woodger formalizes in his monograph. They, like the logical terms, may be regarded as terms taken over from other disciplines. Therefore, those truths in Woodger's theory which contain either or both "*P*" and "*T*" as their only essential, non-logical constants, may also be regarded as truths which are not specific to the theory *T*. These terms come from disciplines in which they are treated independently of any biological terms like "cell."<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

After all these discussions of general methodological points, I should like to return now to the main problem of the paper—the issues involved in the analysis of the phrase "historical explanation." It should be obvious from the start that the search for the terms which are specific to history provides the most difficult problem of its kind. If we proceed empirically, and examine history books in an effort to determine which terms are specific to history we find ourselves in a morass, chiefly because of the number of terms which come from other sciences. The matter is not as simple as it is in connection with Woodger's small theory. There we find it relatively easy to single out those terms which are specific to the theory, as opposed to those coming from presupposed sciences. Woodger's theory is axiomatized and therefore it presents us with the answer to the question we are interested in, to a certain extent. It provides, from our point of view, a logical analysis of the theory. If we could do for history what Woodger has done for a small part of biology, we should have answers to some of the questions raised in this paper. Although one would hardly be making

12. "The general theory of the concept 'part of' has been developed by S. Lesniewski under the name of *Meréologie*," Tarski says in the appendix he contributes to Woodger's *Axiomatic Method*, p. 161, n. 1.

an unguarded claim if one called this unlikely, it does not follow from this that we are not able to state some of the terms which are specific to history. This is a much smaller order, and can be accomplished in many cases without setting up a rigorous axiom-system for the discipline under consideration.

An examination of any history book will reveal terms that would hardly be called specifically historical and yet which are necessary for the expression of what are called "historical facts." Take a simple statement of historical fact like "Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Milvan Bridge on October 28, 312," which is likely to appear in any history of the Roman Empire. Although it is highly unlikely that the term "defeated" is a physical term, and although many philosophers hold that the terms "Maxentius" and "Constantine" are not physical terms, there can be no doubt about the terms "the Milvan Bridge" and "October 28, 312." The last two are names of places and times, and these are surely not specific to history; they are physical terms which are essential to the expression of a historical fact in the way that logical constants are. But because there are terms in this statement which occur in it essentially and which are neither logical nor physical, we cannot call it a physical statement. However, there are other statements which appear in history books and which consist of only physical and logical constants; in short, there are physical statements which appear in history books. To take a simple example, a historian of the middle ages tells us that Anjou, Normandy, and Gascony were shaken by earthquakes in 1207, 1214, and 1223 respectively.<sup>13</sup> Thus history may be said to presuppose physics. The same historian tells us of the existence of famine in twelfth-century France. "Famine" is no physical term, but it is not a specifically historical term. Thus history also presupposes biology, or whatever science contains the word "famine." The relation of presupposition, as it has been defined, helps us to clarify the statement, frequently made by philosophers, that many "factors" enter into history. Without going into this in detail, we may say that possibly what this means is that historical statements frequently contain terms from other sciences, and that historical works contain empirical statements that are not historical. In short, it means that history presupposes an enormous number of sciences other than itself.

Let us continue our comparison of the statement "Anjou was shaken by an earthquake in 1207"; and "Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Milvan Bridge on October 28, 312." We have observed that the first is historical, but not specifically historical, whereas the second is a specifically historical statement. Two points follow: First, that an explanation made up solely of statements of the first kind (i.e. historical, but not specifically historical statements) would not be a historical explanation. This is shown by the fact that a seismological explanation of *why* the earthquake took place in Anjou in 1207, would not be called a historical explanation. It also follows that an explanation of why Constantine defeated Maxentius, if it contained as constituents only specifically historical truths, would be a historical explanation.

13. A. Luchaire, *Social France in the Time of Philip Augustus*, p. 1.

These two points deserve elaboration. (1) The fact that a historian would not normally be impelled to explain why an earthquake took place in Anjou in 1207 indicates the role which physical statements play in history. In general, physical statements will appear only if the historian believes that they can serve as initial statements in an explanation terminating in a specifically historical statement. In other words, physical truths appear in history books, not because historians are interested in physics, but rather because they are interested in all the facts which will help them explain specifically historical facts. This is not only true of physical statements, but of all statements coming from sciences which are presupposed by history. This brings us to our comment about Constantine's defeat of Maxentius in the last paragraph.

In saying that an explanation of why Constantine defeated Maxentius would be historical, it was specified that this explanation had to contain only specifically historical truths. The need for this condition, of course, flows directly from our definition of "historical explanation." It also reveals an important possibility which we have only mentioned, but have not discussed. It implies the possibility that a specifically historical fact might be explained by referring, not to specifically historical facts, but to facts that are not specifically historical. In other words, it suggests a distinction between what we have called a historical explanation and an explanation of a specifically historical fact. Not all explanations of specifically historical facts are historical explanations.

Luchaire,<sup>14</sup> after discussing the various famines in twelfth-century France, says: "Famine produced brigandage." The illustration suits our point very well. No doubt the generalization involved is not very clear, and one might hesitate before saying that all famines are followed by brigandage. Nevertheless, whatever qualifications are necessary to make the generalization involved true, the resulting statements would contain the terms "famine" and "brigandage." It is reasonable to construe "famine" as a biological term and "brigandage" as a historical term. It would also seem that the initial statements in the explanation express a biological fact to the effect that a group of people were in a certain biological state. The statement deduced, however, would express something to the effect that a group of people were in a certain social state. The generalization which, when conjoined with the biological statement, implies the specifically historical statement, would contain both biological and specifically historical terms. Taken all in all, the explanation would not be historical simply because of the appearance of one specifically biological statement, *i.e.* the statement of the fact that the famine occurred.

This raises a very important question. Are there, it may be asked, any explanations of the kind we have just discussed? In other words, are there any explanations of specifically historical facts which appeal only to biological facts in the manner of the above explanation. When this question is

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14. *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

raised we are forced to examine our illustration more carefully. We must ask whether the historian really intended to say that the mere presence of a certain biological phenomenon was enough to account for the specifically historical phenomenon that followed. Is it not likely, we may ask, that the historian would have to qualify his generalization: "Famine produced brigandage," so that it would read: "Famine, together with another condition designated by a specifically historical term, produced brigandage"? If this question is answered in the affirmative then we might be impelled to raise the same question about all explanations which are supposed to explain historical facts by reference to only non-historical facts. If it can be shown that all the generalizations involved have to be revised in the way suggested, it is obvious that the statement of an initial condition would never be anything but a specifically historical statement. The generalization guiding the explanation would relate the appearance of famine plus some specifically historical condition, with the specifically historical condition to be explained, and the statement of the initial condition would involve an affirmation of the antecedent of the generalization. But the antecedent of such a generalization would contain a reference to a specifically historical condition and another condition. The mere presence of a specifically historical term in this conjunction of statements, however, would make the conjunction a specifically historical statement. Now, the generalization guiding the explanation also contains a specifically historical term in an essential way, and therefore it too is a specifically historical statement. The same is obviously true of the statement expressing the fact to be explained.<sup>15</sup> Since all three constituent statements are specifically historical, the explanation is a historical explanation.

The question which is raised is one whose answer I am not able to give. The problem, however, is fairly clear. We must try to find out whether there are explanations of historical facts which are not historical explanations, the latter phrase being interpreted as we have in this paper.

## V

Thus far, although we have spoken frequently of specifically historical terms, we have not stated explicitly what we mean by the term "specifically historical term." The reader has been given some suggestions, but at no point have we defined the notion. The present section of the paper will not

15. The following question may be raised. Since the generalization which guides an explanation of a specifically historical fact, is a specifically historical statement, and since the explanation may be regarded as composed of two statements—the statement to be deduced and a conjunction of all others—and since this conjunction, insofar as it contains the generalization, is a specifically historical statement, why isn't every explanation of a historical fact a historical statement? Obviously the statement expressing the fact to be explained is specifically historical, and so is any conjunction containing a specifically historical statement, specifically historical. To meet this question adequately we should be forced to define the notion *constituent of an explanation* so that the conjunction of a generalization guiding an explanation and statements of initial conditions, is not a statement which is a constituent of an explanation.



terminate with such a definition. In it, however, an attempt will be made to remove certain misunderstandings of the problem.

We have seen how history presupposes other sciences. It presupposes physics insofar as it refers to times and places, and assumes the truth of physical laws; it also presupposes physics insofar as it tries to establish as many singular physical truths as will contribute to the explanation of specifically historical facts. History also presupposes sciences like chemistry and biology. In fact, it seems almost impossible to put a limit on the number of sciences history does presuppose. Thus far we have mentioned only the sciences which do not study the specifically human or purposive behavior of human beings. But obviously history presupposes all of the sciences that deal with human purposive behavior. In fact, the difficult thing is to say where they stop and where history begins. In other words, the terms which are specific to sciences dealing with purposive human behavior seem so characteristic of history that we are not able to say whether they are terms from a presupposed science or specific to history itself. It seems clear that one part of these terms are not specific to history, namely, those which come from what is called "individual psychology." If anything, singular statements in individual psychology which appear in history books appear there because they may help explain social facts, or cultural facts.<sup>16</sup> But even if we agree that the terms which are terms of individual psychology are not specific to history, we still have to deal with all those terms that come from sciences of social behavior.

The tendency of historians in the last century has been to stress the fact that history is a study of social or cultural phenomena. Some find the origins of this view in Guizot, Thierry, and Mignet; others emphasize Marx's decisive role in the formation of this approach; still others find it in the writings of historians like Lamprecht and Pirenne; James Harvey Robinson has called it "The New History." This tendency, as we view it in the language of this paper, incorporates the admission that history presupposes all the social sciences. But, it might be thought, if history is to be a discipline distinct from the others, then, over and above what it takes from other sciences, it must contain terms that are neither economic, nor sociological, nor anthropological, etc. But if this condition is imposed, i.e. if all these sciences are regarded as distinct from history, and if the historian is expected to produce terms which fall into none of these sciences, it will be impossible for the historian to establish the uniqueness of his discipline. No examination of history books will yield terms that cannot be classified as terms from some other science. If one imposes this task on the historian in search of terms specific to history, one cannot hope to define "historical statement" or "historical explanation" as different from other kinds of statements and explanations.

An actual study of the predicates which the historian is especially concerned to apply will not permit any sharp distinction between them

16. E. Zilsel (*op. cit.*) says: "Psychological laws deal with the behaviour of human individuals, historical laws with large groups of individuals, . . . with cultures, states, nations, occupations, classes."

and what are commonly called sociological predicates.<sup>17</sup> If it is the purpose of the historian to give a picture of the social structure and development of a given society, then historical statements will not be distinguishable from sociological statements. The same holds for historical and sociological explanations.

The point may be illustrated by reference to the recent work of Prof. F. J. Teggart—*Rome and China* (1939). Prof. Teggart emphasizes the need for a consideration of *classes* of events in order to establish what he calls "causation in historical events" and therefore "historical laws." In order to illustrate his methodological point he chooses the class of barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire between 58 B.C. and A.D. 107. The first result of his investigation—the chief feature of which is the comparison of events occurring in different places throughout the world at that time—is that every uprising between 58 B.C. and A.D. 107 on the European borders of the Empire had been preceded by the outbreak of war either on the eastern frontiers of the Empire or in the Western Regions of the Chinese. More specifically, Teggart claims, "whereas wars in the Roman east were followed uniformly and always by disturbances on the lower Danube and the Rhine, wars in the eastern T'ien Shan were followed uniformly and always by disturbances on the Danube between Vienna and Budapest."<sup>18</sup>

If we consider the term "barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire during the period 58 B.C. to A.D. 107," as designating a class of events, we must ask whether it is specifically historical in a sense which would prevent it from being a term of sociology. The class denoted by this term, of course, is a complex one. It is the result of performing logical operations on other classes; it is a logical product of at least three classes. The first is the class of invasions, symbolically "I"; the second the class of activities carried on by barbarians, "B"; the third, the class of events which went on in the Roman Empire between 58 B.C. and A.D. 107, "D." The reason for breaking the original term down into simpler components is to show that it is constructed out of terms which are, I think, sociological and physical. The term "I" could be said to be a sociological term, because it designates a class of group-actions; the property of *being an invasion* is assigned to actions of masses of people. The term "B" is sociological for the same reason. The remaining term, "D," is physical. The only remaining sign is the sign for class-product, which is logical.

The fact that a term in a supposedly historical statement like Teggart's

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17. Hempel, in the paper cited above, says: "The considerations developed in this paper are entirely neutral with respect to the problem of 'specifically historical laws': neither do they presuppose a particular way of distinguishing historical from sociological and other laws, nor do they imply the assumption that empirical laws can be found which are historic in some specific sense." (See p. 355 above.) In the present paper I am not neutral; in fact, I think that the phrases "sociological term" and "specifically historical term" designate the same class of terms, provided one construes the former widely enough so as to include economic and political terms.

18. F. J. Teggart, "Causation in Historical Events," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 3, pp. 8-9 (1942). This article contains a useful summary of the results of Teggart's *Rome and China*.

can be constructed out of sociological, physical, and logical terms, shows that statements which are normally called historical might, without impropriety, also be called sociological. That the same could be done for most laws which are called historical or sociological is a statement which I believe, but which I shall not try to prove at the moment. It suggests that whatever the terms which are specific to history are, they are not any different from those of sociology, where the latter is construed as the science of society. And for this reason sociological explanation and historical explanation are not fundamentally different from a logical point of view.

### POSTSCRIPT (1957)

The preceding article has been slightly revised in order to eliminate certain awkward passages and to state certain points more clearly, but the view of historical explanation has been left intact because I still endorse it. Assuming as I did in my paper that the historian sometimes engages in causal explanation of the regularistic kind, how can we distinguish those explanations which are offered by historians except by reference to the kinds of concepts or predicates employed in the explanation? And if we hold that the historian is primarily interested in man's *social* behavior, how else can such behavior be described and explained except by the use of concepts which are not fundamentally different from those used by sociologists?

This does not mean that the reader of historical works will find only this kind of explanation in them. Some historians have occasion to offer explanations which are not sociological in character. Indeed, some historians incorporate into their works physical explanations of certain physical events like the tidal wave at Lisbon or the San Francisco earthquake. I do not wish to assert that such explanations have no place in historical works. But I do believe that the *most typical* concern of the historian where he engages in explanation is with social events or circumstances and that these will be reported and explained in language that is not sharply distinguishable from that of the sociologist. For this reason I am not fazed by the criticism of my article offered by the editor of this volume in his own book *The Nature of Historical Explanation*.

Mr. Gardiner says:

Mr. White asks the question: What is the difference between an historical explanation and an explanation occurring in one of the sciences, e.g. biology? He points out that the characteristic of a biological explanation is the occurrence of specifically biological terms "in an essential way"; and seems to consider that it must therefore be the characteristic of an historical explanation that there should occur within it specifically historical terms. This is surely false: at one point in his *English Social History* Professor Trevelyan writes of the establishment of the 154 new hospitals and dispensaries in the 125 years after 1700, "they were the outcome of individual initiative and of co-ordinated voluntary effort and subscription." That is a *bona fide* historical explanation, but I can find no "specifically historical

terms" present. And the search for such terms appears to originate in the attempt to assimilate history to science in the manner which I have tried to show in this section to be pointless. It would be wearisome to repeat the thesis that specific scientific terminologies are a function of particular scientific systems, and that history presents us with no such system. There are, it is true, certain terms like "revolution," "class-struggle," and so forth which appear to be more historical than others, in the sense that they are found in history books more than elsewhere. But they are certainly not the preserve of history: journalists, propagandists, social reformers, politicians, novelists, even "plain men," use them easily and with perfect propriety. The language in which history is written is for the most part the language of ordinary speech.<sup>19</sup>

My reply to Mr. Gardiner is as follows. First of all he appears to neglect my main point, which is conditional and to the effect that if there are any specifically historical terms, we cannot distinguish them sharply from sociological terms. I should say that the term "co-ordinated voluntary effort" in the example quoted by Gardiner from Trevelyan can count as a sociological term and also as a specifically historical term. Therefore Mr. Gardiner has chosen an illustration which does not support his own polemical point. But let us suppose that he had argued more effectively for it, that he had successfully culled from a history book an explanation which contained no terms that might be called "sociological," for it is not hard to find such explanations. Would this refute the view that the *primary* concern of the historian is to describe and explain *social* behavior or the view that specifically historical terms are not sharply distinguishable from sociological terms? Not at all. The fact that other kinds of explanation appear in history books is beside the point because not every explanation that appears in a history book is an historical explanation. Moreover, when Mr. Gardiner says that terms like "revolution" and "class-struggle" are not the "preserve of history," he comes close to making *my* point, which is that they are also sociological terms. The fact that "journalists, propagandists, social reformers, politicians, even 'plain men,' use them easily and with perfect propriety" is irrelevant. After all, plain men use the words "every," "is," and "not" but surely Mr. Gardiner would not conclude from this that these terms are not specifically logical. Nor would he say that "1," "+," "2," "=", and "3" are not arithmetical because politicians can count. All sorts of people may use the terms "speed" and "length" correctly without thereby supplying evidence against the view that they are physical terms. A term that is on everybody's lips is surely not *on that account* prevented from being a "scientific" term. I fear that Mr. Gardiner has unwittingly fallen in with one of the most wretched dogmas of some of our sociologists, namely that if a word is understood by everybody, it is not sociological. My main point can therefore withstand Mr. Gardiner's criticism.

Another critic of my original paper, Professor Popper, has raised a different objection.<sup>20</sup> If I understand him correctly he believes that the

19. Pp. 62-63.

20. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II, pp. 246-52; pp. 343-44.

kinds of generalizations employed in historical explanations are so simple and trivial that we can hardly call them "sociological laws." With this I cannot agree. Some of these tacitly accepted generalizations may be, as Professor Popper says, left tacit because they are so obvious, but others are left unspoken because of their enormous complexity and this is surely compatible with their being sociological. This is why so much of historical explanation takes the form of what Hempel calls an "explanation-sketch"<sup>21</sup>—something which falls short of an explanation through a failure to express all the generalizations involved.

I should agree that sociologists are more professionally concerned than historians are to make explicit these tacitly accepted generalizations, but insofar as historians do offer causal explanations and employ social or sociological concepts in their explanations they do not do anything fundamentally different from what a sociologist does when he explains. For this reason I think that a radical separation between sociological and historical explanation is not only inaccurate as a description of what practitioners of both subjects do when they explain, but more important, that a deliberate fostering of such a separation is unsound because it does not result in a division of labor which is intellectually productive. The philosopher of history and the social sciences is not merely a recorder of the practices of historians and social scientists but also someone who can recommend and promote a certain methodological policy even when it runs counter to the prevailing practice of those who happen to hold the chairs in a given subject.

I wish to make one technical correction as a result of a very helpful comment by Dr. Israel Scheffler. He has pointed out to me privately that my statement that a truth which is specifically of *S* is one that contains some specific terms of *S* in an essential way, is not adequate for my purposes. For if this were taken as a definition, then the statement "Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Milvan Bridge on October 28, 312" would be both a truth specifically of physics (because of its inclusion of a dating term in an essential way) *and* a statement specifically of history (because of its containing the term "defeated"). And this is incompatible with certain things that I say in the paper. I see now that what I have tacitly assumed is that a truth is specifically of *S* provided that (1) it contains terms which are specific to *S* in an essential way and that (2) all other terms which occur essentially in the truth are specific to sciences presupposed by *S*. I dimly saw this when I made the qualification I made in footnote 9 about specifically logical truths, for there I shrank from calling every truth a logical truth simply because every truth contains some logical constants in an essential way. The addition of condition (2) takes care of the difficulty raised by Scheffler and also makes clear why, for example, the statement "*a* is a cell" is a biological statement and not a logical statement, in spite of the essential appearance in it of the logical word "is."

21. *Op. cit.*

Finally, I wish to say that had William Dray's extremely interesting book *Laws and Explanation in History* come into my hands sooner, I should certainly have taken up some of his thoughtful comments on my paper.

## ERNEST NAGEL

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### Some Issues in the Logic of Historical Analysis\*

According to Aristotle, poetry, like theoretical science, is "more philosophic and of graver import" than history, for the former is concerned with the pervasive and universal, and the latter is addressed to the special and the singular. Aristotle's remark is a possible historical source of a widely held current distinction between two allegedly different types of sciences: the nomothetic, which seek to establish abstract general laws for indefinitely

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repeatable processes; and the ideographic, which aim to understand the unique and nonrecurrent. It is often maintained that the natural sciences are nomothetic, whereas history (in the sense of an account of events) is ideographic; and it is claimed in consequence that the logic and conceptual structure of historical explanations are fundamentally different from those of the natural sciences. It is my aim here to examine this and related issues in the logic of historical analysis.

## I

Even a cursory examination of treatises in theoretical natural science and of books on history reveals the *prima facie* difference between them, that by and large the statements of the former are general in form, and contain few if any references to specific objects, places, and times, whereas the statements of the latter are almost without exception singular and replete with proper names, dates, and geographic specifications. To this extent, at least, the alleged contrast between the natural sciences as nomothetic and history as ideographic appears to be well founded.

It would, however, be a gross error to conclude that singular statements play no role in the theoretical sciences or that historical inquiry makes no use of universal ones. No conclusions concerning the actual character of specific things and processes can be derived from general statements alone; and theories and laws must be supplemented by initial or boundary conditions when the natural sciences attempt to explain any particular occurrence. Nor does the familiar and often useful distinction between "pure" and "applied" natural science impair the relevance of this point. For, clearly, even the pure natural sciences can assert their general statements as empirically warranted only on the basis of concrete factual evidence, and therefore only by establishing and using a variety of singular statements. And there are branches of natural science, such as geophysics and animal ecology, that are concerned with the spatiotemporal distribution and development of individual systems. It follows, in short, that neither the natural sciences taken as a whole nor their purely theoretical subdivisions can be regarded as being exclusively nomothetic.

Neither can historical study dispense with at least a tacit acceptance of universal statements of the kind occurring in the natural sciences. Thus, although the historian may be concerned with the nonrecurrent and the unique, he selects and abstracts from the concrete occurrences he studies, and his discourse about what is individual and singular requires the use of common names and general descriptive terms. Such characterizations are associated with the recognition of various kinds or types of things and occurrences, and therefore with the implicit acknowledgment of numerous empirical regularities. Again, one phase of a historian's task is to establish the authenticity of documents and other remains from the past, the precise meaning of recorded assertions, and the reliability of testimony concerning past events. For the effective execution of this task of external and internal criticism, the historian must be armed with a wide assortment of general

laws, borrowed from one or the other of the natural and social sciences. And, since historians usually aim to be more than mere chroniclers of the past, and attempt to understand and explain recorded actions in terms of their causes and consequences, they must obviously assume supposedly well-established laws of causal dependence. In brief, history is not a purely ideographic discipline.

Nevertheless, there is an important asymmetry between theoretical and historical sciences. A theoretical science like physics seeks to establish both general and singular statements, and in the process of doing so physicists will employ previously established statements of both types. Historians, on the other hand, aim to assert warranted singular statements about the occurrence and interrelations of specific actions; and though this task can be achieved only by assuming and using general laws, historians do not regard it as part of their task to *establish* such laws. The distinction between history and theoretical science is thus somewhat analogous to the difference between medical diagnosis and physiology, or between geology and physics. A geologist seeks to ascertain, for example, the sequential order of geologic formations, and he is able to do so by applying various physical laws to the materials he encounters; it is not the geologist's task, *qua* geologist, to establish the laws of mechanics or of radioactive disintegration that he may employ.

The fact that historical research is concerned with the singular, and seeks to ascertain the causal dependencies between specific occurrences, does not warrant the widespread contention that there is a radical difference between the logical structure of explanations in the historical and the generalizing sciences. I shall consider only one specific argument to support the claim that there is such a difference. It has been said that there is a demonstrable *formal* difference between the "general concepts" of the theoretical sciences and the "individual concepts" assumed to be the goals of historical inquiry. Concepts of the first kind are alleged to conform to the familiar logical principle of the inverse variation of the extension and intension of terms: when a set of general terms is arranged in order of their increasing extensions, their intensions decrease. But quite the reverse is said to be the case for the individual concepts of historical explanations, since the more inclusive the "scope" of such a concept, the richer and fuller is its "meaning." Thus, the term "French Enlightenment" is claimed to have not only a more inclusive scope than the term "the life of Voltaire," but also to possess a fuller intension.<sup>1</sup>

But this is simply a confusion, derived in part from a failure to distinguish the relation of *inclusion* between the extensions of terms, from some form of *whole-part* relation between an instance of a term and a component of that instance. Thus, the French Enlightenment may be said to "contain" as one of its "components" the life of Voltaire; and it is doubtless correct to maintain that the term "French Enlightenment" is "richer in meaning or

1. Rickert, H. *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*. Tübingen, 1921.



content" than the term "the life of Voltaire." But the *extension* of the term "French Enlightenment" does not include the *extension* of the term "the life of Voltaire," so that the logical principle under discussion cannot be significantly applied to these terms.

More generally, there appears to be no good reason for claiming that the general pattern of explanations in historical inquiry, or the logical structure of the conceptual tools employed in it, differs from those encountered in the generalizing and the natural sciences. The explanatory premises in history, as in the natural sciences, include a number of implicitly assumed laws, as well as many explicitly (though usually incompletely) formulated singular statements of initial conditions. The tacitly assumed laws may be of various kinds. They may be statements of regularities well attested in some special science, or they may be uncoded assumptions taken from common experience; they may be universal statements of invariable concomitance, or they may be statistical in form; they may assert a uniformity in temporal sequence, or they may assert some relation of co-existent dependence. The singular statements of initial conditions are of comparable variety, and although the truth of many of them is often incontrovertible it is frequently highly conjectural. Indeed, the relevance of such singular statements to the specific problems under investigation, as well as their truth, are questions upon which historians are often undecided or unable to achieve unanimity. There are, in fact, several problems in this connection that are of much concern to historical research, although they are not without relevance to other branches of social science as well. I therefore turn to consider briefly some of the real and alleged difficulties that plague the pursuit of historical knowledge.

## II

It is a platitude that research in history as in other areas of science selects and abstracts from the concrete occurrences studied, and that however detailed a historical discourse may be it is never an exhaustive account of what actually happened. Curiously enough, it is the very selectivity of history that generates many of the broader questions relating to the nature of historical inquiry and is sometimes made the occasion for wholesale skepticism concerning the possibility of "objective" explanations in historical matters. Since a historian exercises selection in choosing problems for study, and also in his proposed solutions to them, it will be convenient to examine some of the relevant issues under these two heads.

1) Historians do not all concern themselves with the same things, and there are undoubtedly many past events that have received attention from no historian. Why does one historian occupy himself with ancient Greece, another with modern Germany, still another with the development of legal institutions in the American colonies, a fourth with the evolution of mathematical notation, and so on? Is there some general feature which differentiates those occurrences that are of concern to historians from those that are not? And, above all, is a historian prevented from giving a warranted

or objective account of things because of his initial choice of a limited problem?

It is clear that there is no uniform answer to the first of these queries, for in historical inquiry as in other branches of science a variety of circumstances may determine what problems are to be investigated. It may be individual preference and endowment, controlled by education and the influence of teachers; it may be professional obligation or the desire for financial gain; it may be national pride, social pressure, or a sense of political mission. Historians of ideas have given some attention to this matter, and have uncovered interesting data concerning stimuli to specific investigations. But there is no *prima facie* reason to believe that, because a historical inquiry begins with a specific problem, or because there are causal determinants for his choice, a historian is in principle precluded—any more than is a natural scientist—from rendering an adequate account of the subjects he is investigating.

Many writers maintain, however, that the selectivity of history is peculiar in that the historian is inescapably concerned with "value-impregnated" subject matter. Thus, according to one influential view, an individual or process can be properly labeled as "historical" only if it is "irreplaceable," either because it uniquely embodies some universally accepted cultural value or because it is instrumental to the actualization of such a value. In consequence, the supposition that historical inquiry can ignore theoretical value relations is said by some writers to involve a self-deception,<sup>2</sup> whereas other commentators have concluded that unlike the physical sciences "history is violently personal," since "stars and molecules have no loves and hates, while men do."<sup>3</sup> There is, however, no basis for the claim that historical study is addressed exclusively to value-impregnated occurrences, unless indeed the word "history" is arbitrarily redefined so as to conform with the claim. For, although undoubtedly much historical inquiry is concerned with events that may be so characterized, there are also many investigations commonly called "historical" that are not of this nature—for example, inquiries into the development of the stars, biological species, and much else. More generally, there appears to be no warrant for any of the various claims that the occurrences studied by historians are distinguished by some inherent differentiating feature from those that are not. Moreover, even when a historian is concerned with admittedly value-impregnated subject matter or with occurrences manifesting various passions, it by no means follows that he must himself share or judge those values or passions. It is an obvious blunder to suppose that only a fat cowherd can drive fat kine. It is an equally crude error to maintain that one cannot inquire into the conditions and consequences of values and evaluations without necessarily engaging in moral or aesthetic value judgments.

There is also the broad question whether historical inquiry is inevitably guilty of distorting the facts because it is addressed to limited problems and

2. *Ibid.*, 254.

3. Nevins, A. *The Gateway to History*. New York, 1938.

is concerned only with certain selected materials of the past. The supposition that it entails the view that one cannot have competent knowledge of anything unless one knows everything, and is a corollary to the philosophic doctrine of the "internality" of all relations. It will suffice here to note that, were the doctrine sound, not only would every historical account ever written be condemned as a necessarily mutilated and distorted version of what has happened, but a similar valuation would have to be placed on all science, and indeed on all analytical discourse. In short, the fact that inquiry is selective because it originates in a specific and limited problem places the historian in no worse position than it does other scientists with respect to the possibility of achieving what is commonly characterized as objectively warranted knowledge.

2) Historical inquiry is selective not only in its starting point; it is also selective in proposing solutions to its problems. A variety of skeptical doubts about the possibility of an objective history has been expressed in consequence.

One such expression takes the form that, in view of the inexhaustibly numerous relations in which a given event stands to other events, no account can ever render the "full reality" of what has occurred. Accordingly, since every historical account covers only a few aspects of an occurrence and stops at some point in the past in tracing back its antecedents, every proposed explanation of that occurrence is said to bear the mark of arbitrariness and subjectivity. Part of this objection can be summarily dismissed with the reminder that it is never the task of any inquiry initiated by a specific problem to *reproduce* its subject matter, and that it would be a gratuitous performance were a historian in the pursuit of such a problem to formulate "all that has been said, done, and thought by human beings on the planet since humanity began its long career." Not only is the bare fact that inquiry is selective no valid ground for doubting the objectively warranted character of its conclusions; on the contrary, unless an inquiry were selective it would never come near to resolving the specific question by which it is generated.

However, the objection under discussion also rests on another misconception: it in effect assumes that since every causal condition for an event has its own causal conditions, the event is never properly explained unless the entire regressive series of the latter conditions are also explained. It has been maintained, for example, that

A Baptist sermon in Atlanta, if we seek to explain it, takes us back through the Protestant Reformation to Galilee—and far beyond in the dim origins of civilization. We can, if we choose, stop at any point along the line of relations, but that is an arbitrary act of will and does violence to the quest for truth in the matter.<sup>4</sup>

But is there any violence to the truth? Is *B* not a cause of *A* simply because *C* is a cause of *B*? When some future position of a planet is predicted with the help of gravitational theory and information about the initial condition

4. Beard, C. A. *The Discussion of Human Affairs*. New York: Macmillan, 1936.

of the solar system at some given time, is there ground for skepticism simply because the assumed initial conditions are in turn the outcome of previous ones? These are rhetorical questions, for the answers to all of them are obviously in the negative. Moreover, precisely what is the problem in connection with the Baptist sermon in Atlanta? Is it why a given individual delivered it at a stated time and occasion, or why he chose a particular text and theme, or why that occasion happened to arise, or why Baptists flourish in Atlanta, or why they developed as a Protestant sect, or why the Protestant Reformation occurred, or why Christianity arose in antiquity? These are all quite different questions, and an adequate answer for one of them is not even relevant as a proposed solution for the others. The supposition that, when a problem is made definite a regressive chain of answers must be sought if any one answer is to be objectively warranted, is patently self-contradictory. On the other hand, the fact that one problem may suggest another, and so lead to a possibly endless series of new inquiries, simply illustrates the progressive character of the scientific enterprise; that fact is no support for the claim that unless the series is terminated, every proposed solution to a given problem is necessarily a mutilation of the truth.

Skepticism concerning the possibility of objectively warranted explanations in human history takes a more empirical turn when it bases its negations on the influence of personal and social bias upon such inquiry. The doubt embodied in the *aperçu* that history is written by the survivors is by no means a novelty; but in recent years it has been deepened and given a radical form by many sociologists of knowledge. According to some of them, all thought is conditioned and controlled by the "existential situation" in which it occurs; and, especially when thinking is directed to human affairs, the interpretation of observed facts, the selection of problems for inquiry and the methods employed for resolving them, and the standards of validity accepted are all functions of the thinker's unconscious value commitments and world outlook, his social position, and his political and class loyalties. Every cognitive claim concerning matters of vital human interest is therefore said to be valid only within the particular social setting in which it emerges; and the belief that it is possible to obtain explanations that are "true" for everyone, irrespective of his position in a given society, is declared to be part of the self-deception (or "ideology") of a culture.

There appear to be four distinct issues raised by this form of skepticism. In the first place, the choice of particular problems for study, especially inquiries into human affairs, is undoubtedly controlled by the character of a given culture, and sometimes by the status of the student in that culture. An investigation of traffic problems is not likely to be made in an agricultural society, and a man's interest in labor history may very well be causally related to his social position. But, as has already been seen, this form of selective activity on the part of an inquirer does not necessarily jeopardize the objectivity of his findings.

In the second place, no inquiry takes place in an intellectual vacuum, and every investigator approaches his task with information and guiding

ideas derived in large measure from his culture. But it does not follow from this circumstance alone that the conscious and unconscious value commitments associated with the social status of an investigator inevitably influence his acceptance of one conclusion rather than another. The preconceptions he brings to the analysis of a given problem may be neutral to all differences in social values, even when that problem is concerned with human affairs. And, in point of fact, there are many questions in the social as well as in the natural sciences upon which there is complete agreement among students, despite their different social positions and loyalties.

It is undoubtedly the case, in the third place, that the standards of validity operative in an inquiry are *causally* related to other cultural traits, and that social status, class and national bias, and general world perspectives frequently influence what conclusions a man accepts. For example, the degree of precision currently demanded in experimental work is certainly not independent of the current state of technology; and a comparison of Southern and Northern histories of the period of reconstruction following the American Civil War makes amply clear the force of sectional and race bias. This is an area of study that has not yet been systematically exploited, although sociologists of knowledge have already illuminated the genesis of many ideas and the manner in which social pressures enforce their acceptance. In any event, biased thinking is a perennial challenge to the critical historian of human affairs; and research into the causal determinants of bias is of undoubted value for recognizing its occurrence and for mitigating if not always eliminating its influence. The very fact that biased thinking may be detected and its sources investigated shows that the case for objective explanations in history is not necessarily hopeless. Indeed, the assertion that a historian exhibits bias assumes that there is a distinction between biased and unbiased thinking, and that the bias can be identified—for otherwise the assertion would at best be simply futile name-calling. In consequence, it is possible, even if frequently difficult, to correct the bias and to obtain conclusions in better agreement with the evidence. Accordingly, if doubt concerning the objectivity of a historical explanation is based on considerations relating to the causal influence of various social factors upon the evaluation of evidence, it is often salutary and well taken; but it does not entail a wholesale skepticism concerning the possibility of such explanations.

This brings me to the final issue. It is sometimes argued that the social perspective of a student of human affairs is not only causally influential upon his inquiry, but is *logically* involved both in his standards of validity as well as in the meaning of his statements. And it is also maintained that one must therefore reject the thesis that "the genesis of a proposition is under all circumstances irrelevant to its truth."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the radical skepticism concerning objective explanations of human affairs that results is qualified by the further claim that a "relational" type of objectivity

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5. Mannheim, K. *Ideology and Utopia*. New York, 1936. See also this volume, pp. 244 ff. above.

can nevertheless be achieved. Thus, students who share the same social perspective and employ the same conceptual and categorical apparatus will allegedly arrive at similar conclusions on any problem when the standards characteristic of their common perspective are correctly applied. And students operating within different social perspectives can attain objectivity in a "roundabout fashion" by construing their inevitable differences in the light of the differences in the structures of their perspectives.

There are, however, grave factual and dialectical difficulties in these several claims. There is no factual evidence to show that the "content and form" of statements, or the standards of validity employed, are *logically* determined by the social perspective of an inquirer. The facts commonly cited establish no more than some kind of causal dependence between these items. For example, the once much-publicized view that the "mentality" or logical operations of "primitive" social groups are different from those typical of European civilization—a difference that was once attributed to institutional differences in the societies compared—is now generally recognized to be without foundation. Moreover, even the most extreme proponents of the sociology of knowledge admit that there are many assertions (those usually mentioned come from mathematics and the natural sciences) which are neutral to differences in social perspective and whose genesis is irrelevant to their validity. Why cannot assertions about human affairs exhibit the same neutrality? If, as no one seems to doubt, the truth of the statement that two horses can in general pull a greater load than either horse alone is logically independent of the social status of the one who asserts it, what inherent social circumstance precludes such independence for the statement that two laborers can in general dig a ditch of given dimensions more quickly than either laborer working alone?

Second, what is the logical status of the claim that social perspectives enter essentially into the content and warrant of all assertions about human affairs? Is the claim itself meaningful and valid only for those occupying a certain social status? In that case, its validity is narrowly self-limited, no student with a different social perspective can properly understand or evaluate it, and it must be dismissed as irrelevant by most inquirers into social questions. Or is the claim peculiarly exempt from what it asserts, so that its meaning and truth are not logically dependent upon the social status of those who assert it? In that case, then, there is at least one conclusion about human affairs which may be "objectively valid" in the usual sense of this phrase; and if there is one such conclusion, there is no clear reason why there may not be others.

Finally, the relational type of objectivity which the claim admits as attainable is nothing other than objectivity in the customary sense, which the claim appears to deny as possible. A translation formula which renders the "common denominator" of seemingly diverse conclusions stemming from differing social perspectives, cannot in turn be "situationally determined" in the sense under dispute. Indeed, the search for such formulas is but a well-known phase of theoretical research in all areas of inquiry. It is a search for objective invariants in numerically and qualitatively

distinct processes; and when the quest is successful, as it often is, it terminates in laws of greater or less generality, with whose help what is relevant to the occurrence of an event or to the continuance of a process can be distinguished from what is not.

In brief, therefore, although the historian is undoubtedly selective in the conduct of his inquiries, and although personal and social bias frequently color his judgment and control what conclusions he accepts, none of these facts precludes the possibility of warranted explanations for the events he studies.

### III

The elimination of theoretical objections to the possibility of warranted explanations in history obviously does not ensure the realization of that possibility. As a matter of fact, there are serious obstacles, other than those already mentioned, which frequently do obstruct the quest for such explanations.

The search for explanations is directed to the ideal of ascertaining the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of phenomena. This ideal is rarely achieved, however, and even in the best-developed natural sciences it is often an open question whether the conditions mentioned in an explanation are indeed sufficient. Most historical inquiry is even further removed from this ideal, since the full circumstances are often quite complex and numerous and are usually not known. Historians therefore frequently cite only what they regard as the "main," "primary," "principal," "chief," or "most important" causal factors and cover their ignorance of the others by the convenient phrase "other things being equal." To mention but one example, the "main" cause of America's entrance into the first world war is declared by one careful student to be Germany's adoption of an unrestricted submarine warfare, though the factor cited is not assumed to be sufficient for producing the effect.

The "weighting" of causal factors in respect to their "degree of importance" is sometimes dismissed as essentially "arbitrary" and "meaningless"—partly on the ground that there is no warrant for selecting one occurrence as the cause of a given event rather than some prior cause of that occurrence (for example, since unrestricted submarine warfare was Germany's response to the British blockade, this latter occurrence is allegedly as much the cause of America's entrance into the war as is the former), and partly on the ground that no verifiable sense can be attached to such characterizations as "chief" or "most important" in connection with causal factors. It must be admitted that the natural sciences do not appear to require the imputation of relative importance to the causal variables that occur in their explanations; and it is easy to dismiss the question of whether there is any objective basis for such gradations of variables, with a peremptory denial on the ground that, if a phenomenon occurs only when certain conditions are realized, all these conditions are equally essential, and no one of them can intelligibly be regarded as more basic than the others. And it must also be acknowledged that most historians do not appear to

associate any definite meaning with their statements of relative importance, so that the statements often have only a rhetorical intent, from which no clear empirical content can be extracted. Nevertheless, we often do make such claims as that broken homes constitute a more important cause of juvenile delinquency than does poverty, or that the lack of a trained labor force is a more fundamental cause of the backward state of an economy than the lack of natural resources. Many people might be willing to admit that the *truth* of such statements is debatable, but few would be willing to grant that they are totally without *meaning* so that anyone who asserts them is invariably uttering nonsense.

It is desirable, therefore, to make explicit what such statements may be intended to convey. In point of fact, ascriptions of relative importance to determinants of social phenomena appear to be associated with a variety of meanings, some of which I shall try to distinguish. If *A* and *B* are two adequately specified factors upon which the occurrence of a phenomenon *C* is supposed to depend in some fashion, the statements I wish to consider will be assumed to have the schematic form "*A* is a more important (or basic, or fundamental) determinant of *C* than is *B*."

1) *A* and *B* may both be necessary for the occurrence of *C*, though perhaps their joint presence is not sufficient for that occurrence. Then one sense in which *A* might be said to be a more important determinant of *C* than is *B* is simply this: variations in *B* occur infrequently and may be neglected for all practical purposes, whereas variations in *A*, with consequent variations in *C*, are quite frequent and perhaps uncontrollable. Thus, suppose that dislike of foreigners and need for economic markets are both necessary conditions for the adoption of an imperialist policy by some country; but suppose that xenophobia in that country varies little if at all during a given period, whereas the need for foreign markets increases. In this first sense of more important, need for foreign markets is a more important cause of imperialism than is dislike of foreigners.

2) But there is another though more difficult sense of more important. Assume again that *A* and *B* are both necessary for the occurrence of *C*. But suppose that there is some way of specifying the magnitude of variations in *A*, *B*, and *C*, respectively, and that, although changes in one may not be comparable with changes in another, the changes within each item are comparable. Suppose, further, that a greater change in *C* is associated with a given proportional change in *A* than with an equal proportional change in *B*. In that event, *A* might be given a more important rank as a determinant of *C* than is assigned to *B*. For example, assume that a supply of coal and a trained labor force are both necessary for industrial productivity; but suppose that, say, a 10 per cent variation in the labor force produces a greater alteration in the quantity of goods produced (as measured by some convenient index) than does a 10 per cent variation in the coal supply. Accordingly, the availability of a trained labor force could be said to be a more important determinant of productivity than the availability of coal.

3) Suppose now that the joint presence of *A* and *B* is not necessary for the occurrence of *C*, so that *C* can occur under conditions *A* and *Y*, or



under conditions *B* and *Z*, where *Y* and *Z* are otherwise unspecified determinants. In this case, also, there is a sense of more important analogous to the first sense mentioned above. More explicitly, the frequency with which the first condition *B* and *Z* are realized may be small when compared with the frequency of the realization of *A* and *Y*; and this possibility may then be expressed by saying that *A* is a more important determinant of *C* than is *B*. Thus, assume that automobile accidents occur either because of negligence or because of mechanical failure; and suppose that the frequency with which there is such failure that leads to accidents is very much less than the frequency with which carelessness terminates in accidents. In that case, negligence may be said to be a more important cause of accidents than is mechanical failure.

4) Assume, again, that the joint presence of *A* and *B* is not necessary for the occurrence of *C*; and suppose that the relative frequency with which *C* occurs when the condition *A* is realized but *B* is not is greater than the relative frequency of *C*'s occurrence if *B* is realized but *A* is not. It is such a state of affairs which is sometimes intended by the assertion that *A* is a more important determinant of *C* than is *B*. For example, a statement such as that broken homes are a more fundamental cause of juvenile delinquency than is poverty is frequently best interpreted to mean that the relative frequency of delinquency among juveniles coming from broken homes is much greater than among children coming from homes marked by poverty.

5) One final sense of more important must be mentioned. Suppose that a theory *T* is formulated with the help of *A* as a fundamental theoretical term; and suppose that *T* can account for the phenomenon *C* when *T* is supplemented by appropriate data which involve reference to *B*. In consequence, though reference to *B* is essential for explaining *C* with the help of *T*, reference to *B* is not always necessary when *T* serves to explain phenomena other than *C*. Accordingly, since the range of phenomena which fall within the province of *T* (and therefore within the range of application of *A*) is more inclusive than the phenomena for which *B* is relevant, *A* may be said to be a more basic determinant of *C* than is *B*. Something like this sense of more basic appears to be intended by those who claim that the social relations that govern the production and distribution of wealth constitute a more basic determinant of the legal institutions of a society than do the religious and moral ideals professed in that society.

Other senses of more important or more basic can undoubtedly be distinguished, but the five here mentioned appear to be those most frequently used in discussions of human affairs. It is essential to note that, although a definite meaning may thus be associated with ascriptions of greater importance to assumed determinants of social processes, it does not follow that the available evidence does in fact warrant any given assertion of such a claim. Accordingly, even when a historian does intend to convey a verifiable content by such assertions, it is doubtful whether in most cases they are actually supported by competent evidence. There is next to no statistical material bearing on the relative frequency of occurrence of the

phenomena of special concern to students of human affairs. Historians are therefore compelled, willy-nilly, to fall back upon guesses and vague impressions in assigning weights to causal factors. There are often wide divergences in judgment as to what are the main causes of a given event, and one man's opinions may be no better grounded than another's. Whether this defect in current causal imputations in historical research can eventually be remedied is an open question, since the probable cost of remedial measures in terms of labor and money seems staggering. Meanwhile, however, a judicious skepticism concerning the warrant for most if not all judgments of relative importance of causal factors (among those assumed to be relevant to an event) appears to be in order.

Doubtless the basic trouble in this area of inquiry is that we do not possess at present a generally accepted, explicitly formulated, and fully comprehensive schema for weighing the evidence for any arbitrarily given hypothesis so that the logical worth of alternate conclusions relative to the evidence available for each can be compared. Judgments must be formed even on matters of supreme practical importance on the basis of only vaguely understood considerations; and, in the absence of a standard logical canon for estimating the degree in which the evidence supports a conclusion, when judgments are in conflict each often appears to be the outcome of an essentially arbitrary procedure. This circumstance affects the standing of the historian's conclusions in the same manner as the findings of other students. Fortunately, though the range of possible disagreement concerning the force of evidence for a given statement is theoretically limitless, there is substantial agreement among men experienced in relevant matters on the relative probabilities to be assigned to many hypotheses. Such agreement indicates that, despite the absence of an explicitly formulated logic, many unformulated habits of thought embody factually warrantable principles of inference. Accordingly, although there are often legitimate grounds for doubt concerning the validity of specific causal imputations in history, there appears to be no compelling reason for converting such doubt into wholesale skepticism.

## W. B. GALLIE

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In 1950 he was elected Professor of Philosophy at the University College of North Staffordshire. Since 1954 he has been Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in Queen's University, Belfast. He has contributed articles to various philosophical periodicals and is the author of a study of C. S. Peirce, *Peirce and Pragmatism* (1952).

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## Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences\*

### I

The claim that historical study gives rise to a unique kind of understanding, or at least to understanding of a very different kind from that afforded by the natural sciences, is sometimes advanced on grounds and with intentions which no one will wish to dispute. Thus no one denies that history is concerned with particular facts, with what actually happened on this or that particular occasion, whereas the natural sciences are concerned with specimen or sample facts and with what is sure or likely to happen on *any* occasion of given definite description; or, in case this statement should seem to neglect the historian's concern with generality in one sense of that term, we might say that his interest is in virtually any of the conditions and implications of some particular event that fall within that event's actual historical context, whereas the scientist's interest is in implications and conditions that will hold in any conceivable context in which an event of definite description may occur. This contrast in direction of interest can quite properly be described as resulting in different kinds of understanding in the two cases. At other times, however, the claim that historical understanding is unique is urged on grounds that, far from being platitudinous, call for careful philosophical scrutiny; and this is true in particular when it is argued that the general concept of explanation, as ordinarily elucidated by philosophers, is not adequate to the kind—or at least to a certain kind—of explanation which we find exemplified in historical writings. Now this claim seems to me justified; but the form in which I wish to defend it is so moderate that few of those who urge the uniqueness of historical understanding are likely to thank me for my pains. What I have to say affords no support to so-called "intuitionist" theories of historical explanation and understanding: it is much nearer to the view, which has been expounded by Professor Popper and others,<sup>1</sup> that any causal argument can

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1. See in particular Popper's "The Poverty of Historicism, III," *Economica*, May, 1945.

be regarded as historical in so far as it is applied to some particular event; only, where that view emphasizes that, theoretically, *any* kind of causal argument can serve to explain historical events, I wish to show that one kind of causal argument is peculiarly characteristic of historical explanation.

Historians, I shall argue, sometimes explain events in a perfectly good sense of "explain" by referring us to one or a number of their temporally prior *necessary* conditions; they tell us how a particular event happened by pointing out hitherto unnoticed, or at least undervalued, antecedent events, but for which, they claim on broadly inductive grounds, the event in question would not or could hardly have happened. In such cases explanation commences from our recognition of the event to be explained as being of such a kind that *some one* of a disjunction of describable conditions is necessary to its occurrence; and the explanation consists in elucidating *which* one of this disjunctive set is applicable, in the sense of being necessary, to the event in question. Explanations of this broad pattern are, of course, found in other branches of inquiry, e.g. as a first step towards functional explanations; but in so far as conclusions drawn from the assertion or supposal of *necessary conditions only* are found in the developed sciences, they are usually regarded as partial or interim results, to be replaced ultimately by conclusions of arguments of more complete, and by prevailing standards, more satisfactory kinds. Thus we often come to see in a provisional way how the working of one part of a machine is necessary to the working of the whole, whose general character we thus begin to appreciate before we have fully grasped the mechanically relevant properties of all its working parts; ultimately or ideally, however, we should come to appreciate the function of any one such part as a necessary deducible consequence of the actual movements of all the parts considered together. Roughly similar remarks would seem to apply to the use of functional explanations in the biological sciences. In history on the other hand, I wish to claim, explanations in terms of temporally prior necessary conditions are commonly put forward when there is no good ground for accepting—and when indeed there is no consideration of—further explanation of a more complete, and in particular of a predictive, character.

Suppose a historian is asked to explain how a certain statement came to be made, or deliberate action to be taken, or coherent policy pursued. It would be perfectly natural to say that he has explained, e.g. the statement, when he has discovered or inferred the kind of question—or comment or threat or taunt—that evoked it. But in offering this kind of explanation the historian would not necessarily be claiming, and indeed is not likely to be claiming, that some ideally clever person could have predicted the making of the statement given the occurrence of the question; his claim would more naturally be taken to mean that but for the question's having been put—or but for some other of a disjunction of describable conditions—the statement would remain unintelligible in the sense of lacking an appropriate historical context. The predictive explanation in this case, although it would support the same conclusion, would be a further and quite different inference or explanation, of a different logical pattern, and resting upon partially different evidence. It is, to be sure, no part of my

thesis to deny that explanations of predictive pattern are ever found in historical narratives. Of course they are found there; of course for the historian, as for the rest of us, to explain an event very often means to show how it could have been predicted, or how it exemplifies some, perhaps very vague, predictive rule, e.g. "Power corrupts" or "You can do everything with bayonets except sit on them." What I am urging is that, side by side with such predictive explanations, supporting and supported by them, we also find in histories explanations of the kind which I have just outlined, explanations which in their own way do explain, and which for convenience I propose to call "characteristically historical explanations." My main question in what follows is, why are such characteristically historical explanations in their own way perfectly satisfactory?

I shall try to show that there are at least two main grounds for this, of which the second can be regarded as a highly specific form of the first. Summarized very briefly, my thesis is as follows: (1) In pointing back to certain temporally prior conditions, alleged to be necessary to the event to be explained, characteristically historical explanations emphasize either a continuity in direction of development or else a persistence of certain elements, within a particular succession of events. (2) But, in the second place, the continuity or persistence of elements which a characteristically historical explanation emphasizes may be of a kind which serves to render the *explicandum*—when it is some human action or sequence of actions—intelligible or justifiable. Now where the first of these grounds holds but not the second, explanations of the type we are considering are not confined to history proper: they are equally characteristic of the genetic sciences, e.g. of much of biology, geology and of the social and psychological sciences. From one point of view, therefore, the problem or puzzle about characteristically historical explanations is simply one instance of the wider problem of genetic explanations. It is in terms of such wider questions as "Is there such a thing as a characteristically genetic explanation?" "If there is, what distinguishes such an explanation from other forms of causal explanation?" and "What makes us perfectly satisfied with a 'good' genetic explanation when we get one?" that I advance a large part of my argument (section II below). But this is by no means the whole story. The existence, the puzzle, the problem, the interest of characteristically historical explanations are due also to the ways in which they make use of such notions as purpose, motive, belief, understanding, communication, etc., notions which are relevant presumably to human actions alone and about whose applications there are notorious philosophical difficulties; and I shall try to show that my account of characteristically historical explanations throws some much needed light on the "logic" of these notions, and on some of the difficulties which philosophical discussion encounters in connexion with them. Roughly, my claim is that these difficulties are due in large measure to the fact that notions such as purpose, motive, belief, understanding, communication, etc. figure *both* within characteristically historical and within predictive explanations, and that the logical force of any one of these notions inevitably differs according as it is taken as occurring in one sort of explanation or the other (section III).

## II

Is there such a thing as a characteristically genetic explanation? We may usefully approach this question by recalling the account of genetic explanation which has usually been favoured by philosophically-minded biologists during the last ninety odd years. Serious discussion of genetic explanation was stimulated by the gradual recognition that Darwin's account of evolutionary change through the agency of natural selection was very far from affording a complete causal explanation of how species had developed from a presumed common ancestor; the most that Darwin's argument had established was one very general necessary condition to which changes (or for that matter absences of change) in any given species must conform if that species is to survive. An ideally complete causal explanation of any evolutionary change, it came to be realized, would involve, first, a genetic statement—a detailed account of the ancestry and ancestral environments of any particular form of life, and secondly, a causal statement, *i.e.* a statement of certain universal laws, conceived after the model of known physical and chemical laws, in terms of which passage from one definitely described form of life to another might always and everywhere be inferred. As against the Darwinians it was necessary to emphasize the importance of the hoped-for causal or physico-chemical statement; but, as the prospect of a developed bio-chemistry grew brighter, emphasis came to be placed rather on the indispensable positive role of the genetic statement. Thus, supposing that, through the dispensation of a God who loved chemists, bio-chemistry was able to produce under artificial conditions all the forms of life that are known to have existed at any time on or near the earth's surface: then, in a sense, "the riddle of life" would have been explained, the dream of a complete causal explanation of all known forms of life would have come true. But this triumph or miracle of causal explanation would not necessarily answer the question how *historically* some given form of life first arose, or how *historically* it came to undergo this or that change in view of this or that pressure or opportunity within its successive environments. Indeed, not only the incidents of that history, but the particular combinations of causal laws which were relevant to those incidents, might still remain to be disclosed.

Unfortunately, this latter point has never, to my knowledge, been developed by philosophers of biology, who have persisted in regarding genetic explanations (which would go back, ideally, to "primordial causes") as purely *descriptive*. This way of thinking is illustrated in the following passage from Professor Woodger's *Biological Principles*. "The tortuous course taken by a nerve or artery may strike us as strange and we seek an explanation . . . and we find one if it can be shown that in the course of individual development this state of affairs has been brought about by the shifting of neighbouring parts. This seems to be what is meant by an embryological explanation which is 'merely descriptive'. . . . If now we ask why such shifting of parts takes place we can investigate the racial forerunners of the organism in question. From the comparative anatomical and palaeontological data there may be good reason for supposing that the condition in

the animal or plant in question has been reached through an evolutionary shifting of the parts. In this way we should reach a phylogenetic explanation: an historical explanation which *could not be generalized because it would describe a unique series of changes characterising an evolutionary succession*" (my ital.).<sup>2</sup> Professor Woodger then proceeds to contrast this kind of explanation with the kind of causal explanation which physiology might here contribute; and he concludes, "what distinguishes the physiologist's procedure is the fact that he does not record changes normally observable, but the changes which are observed when the organism or its environment is systematically interfered with. He is thus able to discover more than the descriptionist; he is able to investigate the mutual internal dependence of the parts and the role they fulfil in pervasive types of change; i.e. types of change *which can be generalized*" (my ital.).

From this account, we might easily be led to believe that the former "genetic" explanation has nothing causal about it. But that there is a causal reference latent in this explanation is at least very strongly suggested by the sentence "from comparative anatomical and palaeontological data there may be good reason for supposing that the condition . . . has been reached through an evolutionary shifting of the parts." Quite clearly this statement amounts to an application of an observed general regularity to the particular case of change which the biologist is seeking to explain; and as such it has—anyhow on the currently prevalent view of causation—every right to be accounted a causal explanation, albeit an evidently incomplete one. The same point could be urged, perhaps more forcibly, as follows. Suppose the presumed earlier phases of the process of shifting had had no causal relevance whatsoever to the later result; then reference to these phases would be as logically redundant as a reference to e.g. the earlier positions of a shadow whose present position is being explained in terms of the sun's movement and the fixed position of the object which is casting the shadow. But does Professor Woodger want us to believe that there really is such a parallel between the two cases?

The truth seems to be that there is an important contrast between the two kinds of explanation which Professor Woodger, like a number of earlier philosophers of biology, has distinguished; but this contrast is not between explanations that are in causal and explanations that are in strictly non-causal terms. How then should it be expressed? It is to answer this question that we require the notion of a "characteristically genetic explanation"; and the answer I wish to urge is that such an explanation, as exemplified in an embryological or phylogenetic explanation, functions in a fashion that is logically parallel to that of the characteristically historical explanations which we discussed provisionally in section I above. The first prerequisite of a characteristically genetic explanation is that we shall recognize the *explicandum* as a temporal whole whose structure either contains certain persistent factors or else shows a certain definite direction of change or development. Thereupon we look for an antecedent event, the *explicans*, which can be accounted a necessary condition of the *explicandum*, on

2. See Woodger, *op. cit.* pp. 394-395.

ordinary inductive grounds (observations of analogous cases), but more specifically on the ground of a probable continuity—in respect either of persistent factors or of direction of change—between *explicans* and *explanandum*. It just happens to be the case that evidence of the kind required for explanations in this sense is repeatedly found in certain fields, e.g. in rock-strata, fossil-series, the recorded observations of embryologists, natural historians, anthropologists, genetic psychologists and others. In the simplest cases, e.g. many rock-strata or the observed and reported sequence of development of a fertilized ovum, a characteristic order is repeatedly presented to observation; but in many other cases—those in which the need for characteristically genetic explanation is most obvious—the order has to be inferred: e.g. the strata have been inverted or certain aspects of an ovum's development are such that they cannot all be observed in any one particular instance. In general, causal explanation of the characteristically genetic kind passes insensibly in certain cases into a mere assertion of the persistence of some factor or of the existence of some, as yet unexplained, trend in an observed or recorded sequence of events. More commonly, however, the assertion that a later phase of a genetic sequence requires an earlier phase as one of its necessary conditions is explicitly inferential, in the sense both that we are led to assert it through a consideration of the available relevant evidence, and, more important, that it is this evidence which justifies our assertion of it.

The function of characteristic genetic explanations, it should be noted, is by no means confined to the tracing out of single causal lines. It takes only a little reflection to see that the process of relative dating of different series of living forms, rock strata, etc., depends for the most part on our knowledge simply of antecedent necessary conditions of the occurrence of certain observed or reported events. The geologist's knowledge that certain rocks in Scotland and others in Wales date from approximately the same period does not depend on any theories he may entertain as to the sufficient conditions of their formation; and similarly as regards the dating of human affairs. Too often in their discussions of historical and genetic explanations positivistically-minded philosophers appear to assume that the broad chronological pattern of past events is something that is given to the historian or genetic scientist ready-made, or else that it is something that is deduced from certain, miraculously known, initial conditions with the aid of established predictive laws.

We can now bring together our findings as to the need, functions and limitations of characteristically genetic explanations as follows:

(1) A characteristically genetic explanation seeks to establish, or at least helps to indicate, some kind of continuity, between one or a number of temporally prior conditions and a subsequent result.

(2) On the other hand, a characteristically genetic explanation does not pretend to predictive power: the prior event is not taken, in conjunction with certain universal laws, to constitute a sufficient condition of the occurrence of the subsequent event.

(3) Moreover, a characteristically genetic explanation emphasizes the one-way passage of time—what came earlier explains, in the genetic sense,



what came later, and not *vice versa*. In other words the prior event is not taken, in conjunction with certain universal laws, to constitute both a sufficient and a necessary condition of the occurrence of the subsequent event.

Let us assume that satisfaction of these three conditions defines a characteristically genetic explanation: then two important consequences follow. (a) A characteristically genetic explanation cannot, in all cases, be considered as simply the converse of a retrodiction, i.e. any inference from effect to prior cause. In any such inference, to be sure, since the effect is taken as sufficient to establish the occurrence of the cause, the latter must be considered—as in characteristically genetic explanations—as a necessary temporal prior condition of the former. But we must remember that the term “retrodiction” is commonly and properly taken to include the kind of case (e.g. calculation of earlier positions and accelerations of a freely swinging pendulum) in which the “cause” or prior event to which we infer is seen to be a sufficient as well as a necessary condition of the effect or later event as described in our premiss. In other words, retrodictions, as the term is commonly used by logicians, include the kind of case in which we can equally well deduce cause from effect and effect from cause; and this is the kind of case which our condition (3) above expressly excludes. But further, in the second place, the term “retrodiction” is commonly used to cover, *inter alia*, inferences from effects to causes, in which there is no claim to establish continuity of any kind between cause and effect; and such inferences are, of course, excluded by our condition (1) above.

(b) Still more obviously, characteristically genetic explanations do not conform to that conception of explanation which insists—or simply assumes—that an earlier event can be said to explain a later event if and only if the former, taken in conjunction with certain universal laws, provides us with sufficient grounds for deducing the occurrence of the latter. This assertion<sup>3</sup> is indeed tantamount to a denial that characteristically genetic explanations explain in any genuine sense at all. But we have seen that in their own way, and in a perfectly normal and reasonable sense of the word, characteristically genetic explanations do explain—do establish conclusions which it is very important to know, if only because they commonly provide the premisses—the instantial or historical premisses—of further explanations of predictive pattern.

To assert the existence of characteristically genetic explanations, or, in other words, to attempt to describe their peculiar features and functions with some care, is therefore highly pertinent if only in the interests of logical theory. But in fact, our arguments to this end have a much more directly practical value in that they help us to understand the prevalence in genetic studies of a brand of fallacy which, had not the phrase already been appropriated for an important purpose, might well be termed the “genetic fallacy” *par excellence*. Broadly, this kind of fallacy arises because genetic scientists, adhering consciously or unconsciously to the view that

3. In so far as it agrees, or anyhow seems to agree with this assertion, Professor Popper's otherwise admirable account of historical explanation is liable to be misleading. See “The Poverty of Historicism, III,” esp. p. 76 para. 3 and p. 79 paras. 1 and 2.

only predictive or "sufficiency" explanations genuinely explain, are tempted to believe, when they hit on a perfectly good characteristically genetic explanation, that it either must be, or ought to be, or anyhow—if valid and useful—can easily be translated into, an explanation of predictive or quasi-predictive pattern. To cite one well-known instance:

We have all been told that the species giraffe has arisen through a succession of longer and longer necked species because, at every stage in this sequence, possession of unusually long necks gave the species in question certain advantages, *e.g.* as regards food-getting, and thus enabled it to survive and leave descendants whose inherent variability allowed for further changes in the same general direction. But what is the force—or the legitimate interpretation—of the "because" in this explanation? If it means simply that the giraffe and the intermediate species would probably not have survived unless they had possessed certain advantages connected with the possession of long necks, then it is an extremely plausible conjecture. There can be no doubt but that this is a conjecture which really explains: it enables us to pass from the relatively platitudinous assertion that the species giraffe could not have arisen except from the ancestry which, on grounds of continuity, it would appear to have had, to the assertion that unless its ancestry had displayed certain characteristics which are specifically mentioned, or unless this ancestry had conformed in certain specified ways to the general requirement of competition for survival, the species giraffe would not exist today. But if, on the other hand, it is intended—as it often has been in anyhow the popular literature of the subject—that possession of progressively longer and longer necks by the giraffe-ancestors suffices to explain or even contributes in a notable way to some quasi-predictive explanation of the ultimate emergence of the species giraffe, then the argument is utterly fallacious. For one thing, as Professor Woodger has pointed out in discussing this very example, no one in fact knows the detailed characters of the environments within which possession of progressively longer and longer necks is supposed to have been advantageous (*op. cit.* p. 401). But perhaps more pertinent is the fact that variations in this respect must in all cases have called for a vast number of minute adjustments in other organs, without which this variation—or rather this more or less single direction of a great number of successive variations—would have proved, and perhaps in many cases did prove, disastrous rather than advantageous. The truth is that in this kind of spurious "sufficiency" explanation *everything* is assumed that needs to be assumed to get our alleged explanation to do its appointed work.

The same fallacy arises whenever economic or sociological generalizations, which enable us to make valid predictions within a known institutional framework, are applied to past civilizations whose institutional framework remains largely unknown. It is thus, to take one extreme case, that Marxists have exploited our sheer ignorance of "pre-history," and have succeeded in "making sense" for us of remote ages for which the sum of our historical evidence lies, say, in the traces of successive irrigation systems or the survival of a few buried metal tools.

To put the responsibility for reasonings such as these upon the short-

comings or one-sidedness of our inherited inductive logic would, of course, be unjust. What is true, however, is that this one-sidedness reflects, and has unfortunately appeared to endorse a habit of thought which is highly characteristic of our age: *viz.* that which looks to the physical, to the almost total neglect of the genetic sciences, for examples and models of successful explanation.

### III

Characteristically historical explanations can be described in the first instance as such explanations of the deeds of men (individuals, groups, nations, etc.) as conform to the logical pattern and evidential conditions which define characteristically genetic explanations. As with characteristically genetic, so with characteristically historical explanations: there are some in which the antecedent is among the facts already known to or accepted by the historian, and others in which it has to be inferred. Cases of the latter sort are no doubt more characteristic of history, since they include the great majority of those in which the emphasized necessary antecedent is a motive or a belief or a decision or a communication received or a principle or policy or precept adhered to by some agent; and certainly such explanations involve important features and difficulties of their own. But for the purpose of establishing and articulating the general function of characteristically historical explanations, it will be best to concentrate at the outset upon cases of the former sort, *i.e.* those in which the emphasized antecedent necessary condition is a fact already known. A live example will serve to underline my central thesis here.

Suppose we want to explain the two already known and presumably closely connected facts, first, that the personal expectations of the Christian disciples after the death of Christ were turned in a remarkably short time into a proselytizing religion, and second, that this religion was spread in a remarkably short time over the length and breadth of the Mediterranean world. M. Alfred Loisy has suggested that one and the same explanation largely accounts for both of these facts; *viz.* that the Christian "good news" was voiced over the Mediterranean world largely on a platform already provided by the Jewish synagogues, which were themselves the vehicles of a fully established and actively, if not very successfully, proselytizing religion. Thus it turned out that the first Christian emissaries found themselves with audiences ready made and presumably well suited to receive their news—in particular of the fulfilment of the Messianic promise—with joy and acclamation. Now, without scrutinizing the many subordinate points which this explanation serves to clarify, and without wishing to claim that it is altogether historically acceptable, we can at least affirm that all that Loisy has here done is to point out one very important and necessary condition of the result to be explained; certainly he has not established—and indeed would not claim to have established—that the connexion of facts to which he has called attention *suffices* to explain in the predictive sense how, given the antecedent conditions which he has emphasized, the known result could have been predicted or deduced.

With this example in mind we can see more easily and can express in homelier terms what is lacking in the account of historical explanation which Professor Popper and others have favoured. Because they identify the field of explained history—or reasoned narrative—with the field of application of any number of scientific and commonsense generalizations of predictive character, they fail to notice the way in which many historical explanations help to “thicken up” the historian’s narrative by bringing out the continuity between its successive phases, and at the same time to “tighten up” the narrative by emphasizing the dependence—though not the predictable sequence—of its later upon its earlier phases. As a corrective to this mistake, it is reasonable enough to insist, in a currently popular phrase, that the main job of the historian is simply to tell his story: but to this we must add that to tell or to follow even the simplest story is not just to assert or to accept “one damned thing after another”—a brute sequence of temporally and spatially contiguous or overlapping events. To follow a story—or a conversation, or a game, or the development and execution of a policy—involves for one thing some vague appreciation of its drift or direction, a vague sense of its alternative possible outcomes: but much more important for our purpose, it involves a relatively clear appreciation of certain relations of dependence of the sort that characteristically historical explanations serve to articulate, i.e. an appreciation of how what comes later depends upon what came earlier, in the sense that but for the latter the former could not have, or could hardly have, occurred in the way it did occur. Consider, e.g. what we do when a child complains that he cannot follow the story we read aloud to him, or when we ourselves are unable to follow a conversation which we have broken in upon half way through. We re-read to the child the earlier stages of the story, or re-tell them in simpler language so as to emphasize those incidents which give sense or context to the present, puzzling, episode. But in doing this we do not try to show that the present episode was a predictable consequence of earlier events, else the story would have been not un-followable, but just unbearably dull as a story. Similarly in our second example we ask our friends how the conversation started, what considerations, examples, etc. led to its present juncture; but in doing this we do not claim that the present state of the discussion could have been predicted from its origins, since the flow of conversation of intelligent adults is never, or anyhow very seldom, wholly predictable.

This account of the logic of *following* a narrative or a discussion can equally well be applied to the case of *understanding a particular statement*—in contrast to our understanding of a grammarian’s specimen sentence—or for that matter to our understanding of a single intelligent action. An essential part of what we mean by our understanding of a statement is that we appreciate the kind of prior statement or question, whether actually articulated or not, which is required to give it a sense or context but which is most unlikely to afford a sufficient explanation of the original statement’s having been made. Similarly to understand an intelligent action involves the ability, not indeed to have predicted its occurrence from certain earlier events, but to recognize among these earlier events a disjunction of condi-

tions such that some or one of them was required if the action in question was to be of the sort, of the intelligent and intelligible sort, we claim it to have been.

We are now in a position to consider those characteristically historical explanations in which the *explicans* refers to some motive or purpose or belief or information received, that is taken to be a necessary condition of some recorded overt event or deed. Notoriously, explanations of physical results in terms of mental antecedents have given rise to prolonged philosophical perplexity and debate; and our account of characteristically historical explanations might seem particularly questionable on this score since it emphasizes the need of some kind of continuity between antecedents—which in the cases now to be considered will be mental antecedents—and the physical results which they explain. But what kind of continuity, unless in respect of sheer temporal succession, can be observed or inferred between, say, the (mental) acceptance of some proposition and the performance of some appropriately related physical action? Can we always observe or infer a temporal continuity in cases of this kind? Is there not very often an observed temporal gap between, e.g. decision and deed?

It is useful to notice, as a first step in dealing with these difficulties, that they are specifically philosophical difficulties: the historian is virtually insensitive to them. Let us imagine ourselves, as philosophers, approaching a historian with the questions which we have just raised, and pressing him to tell us precisely what he means by the continuity which he seeks to disclose between this or that physical happening and its presumed necessary mental antecedents. Our historian, if so approached, will almost certainly hover between two lines of reply; one modest and negative, the other positive and self-confident. He will confess that of course he does not know precisely what he means by the continuity which he habitually seeks to establish: after all it is not his business to distinguish carefully between the different possible uses of the word "continuity," still less to pronounce on very abstract questions concerning the continuity or lack of continuity between the mental and physical aspects of human action. But in another mood he will rally and protest that he, like everyone else, knows perfectly well how to distinguish a sequence of events in which there is a continuous passage between, say, appreciation and action, from a sequence which is at some point interrupted, frustrated, rendered discontinuous. He will tell us that, in his search for continuity in some sequence of events, he is simply working on the hypothesis that these events make up one intelligible whole, recognized by either the persistence or the continuous development of certain of its elements, and within which at every stage what happens could not or could hardly have happened but for what had just gone before.

To bring out the substance of this answer by an example. Let us suppose that a General has received intelligence the contents of which help us to some extent to make sense of his subsequent decisions and orders. How does the idea of continuity enter into this characteristically historical explanation? Well, the following things seem either undeniable or very reasonably inferred. The General's physical receiving of the message was a necessary

condition of, and in some sense continuous with, his physical process of reading it; this process was a necessary condition of and in some sense continuous with his understanding of it; this process—if the word ‘process’ can here be allowed—was a necessary condition of and in some sense continuous with his acceptance of the veracity and practical relevance of its contents; this process—again if the word “process” be allowed—can reasonably be inferred to have been a necessary condition of and in some sense continuous with his decision to give and his actual physical giving of the spoken order; this in turn was almost certainly a necessary condition of and in some sense continuous with his army’s deployment, the attack, etc. But in treating any such episode as a continuous and intelligible whole the historian does not indulge in any philosophical theorizing as to the nature or grounds of the continuity which he assumes to hold between, for instance, reading and understanding, understanding and assenting, assenting and deciding, deciding and the final issuing of a command; nor does he—or should he—as a historian indulge in any metaphysical speculations as to the General’s intervening state of mind assuming that there was some temporal gap between, e.g. his acceptance of the veracity of the report and his decision to act in the light of it.

To be sure, the continuity which is essential to characteristically historical explanations is not always of the direct and obvious kind which we have here exemplified. Thus an action may perfectly well be explained in terms of the *misunderstanding* of a message, or as the result of someone’s *disobeying* an order, or through the influence of a *conflict of motives* or through a *partial failure* of nerve or concentration in the carrying out of a decision. But such complicated cases, it would seem, do not necessitate any revision of our general account of characteristically historical explanation. The motive, no matter how complex or confused, the understanding or decision, no matter how imperfect, which explains in a characteristically historical explanation, is always conceived as a necessary antecedent condition of the action which follows, and as in certain specifiable ways continuous with it.

But even if it be granted that the *explicans* in a characteristically historical explanation is always suggested in the first instance on the kind of grounds that I have just described, it may still be objected that if our explanation is to be accepted it must enable us to predict certain results which can then be verified independently: for instance any plausible characteristically historical explanation of some recorded fact must enable us to make predictions of a kind that other documents or archaeological evidence can confirm. But this is by no means the only way in which a characteristically historical explanation can receive confirmation: it can be said quite properly to be confirmed if and in so far as it helps us to explain in *characteristically historical fashion* facts other than those which it was first advanced to explain. To give an extremely simplified example. Suppose I hear someone shout down a telephone and infer from this that the speaker at the other end has complained that he cannot hear: This explanation would clearly be strengthened if I were to notice other facts which could be explained in characteristically historical fashion on the basis of it, e.g. if

I noticed that the speaker proceeds to spell out letter by letter certain words, to use very simple familiar words, and so on. In general, verification of a characteristically historical explanation is very commonly of the kind which defenders of the coherence theory of truth have laboured to describe—and have claimed quite unjustifiably to be the necessary and sufficient condition of the acceptability of *any* explanation; and in this connexion it is worth recalling what has often been remarked, that defenders of that theory seem to have elaborated their views with the problems of historical rather than of scientific explanation in mind.

There remains for consideration the important fact that the notions of purpose, motive, belief, etc., figure not only in characteristically historical explanations but in explanations of historic events that are essentially predictive. A historian, like a jury, may conclude that given certain circumstances the existence of a certain motive or the declaration of a certain purpose or even the receipt of certain information suffices to explain some action, which is therefore conceived as having been at least theoretically predictable. The question naturally arises: do not such predictive explanations provide the model or ideal of all historical explanation in terms of motive, purpose, belief, etc., so that, anyhow in theory, the historian is committed to maintaining the general predictability of all intelligent or justifiable human conduct? This ideal, it may be admitted, is not even suggested in our uses of the notions of motive, purpose, etc., in characteristically historical explanations; but, it may be urged, this is simply because of the palpable incompleteness of these explanations, which the historian is indeed forced to make use of, but only *faute de mieux*, because of the paucity of his evidence. The natural hope and aspiration of all forward-looking historians must be that this situation will gradually be altered, not only by further accumulation of historical evidence, but as a result of the findings of psychologists, sociologists, and others. The old-fashioned historian, explaining events for the most part in terms of their at least necessary conditions, had perhaps little reason for affirming the general predictability of human conduct; but the modern historian, who comes to his task armed with the predictive explanations of psychology, sociology, economics and so on, is in a quite different case.

It would be tedious to re-apply in detail here the arguments by which we countered this claim, made with regard to the theoretical replaceability of all characteristically genetic explanations, in section II above. Predictive explanations for the most part neither affirm the necessity of their antecedents to their consequents nor emphasize any continuity of direction or development between them; whilst those predictive explanations which satisfy these conditions satisfy them at too high a cost—they present antecedent and consequent as mutually determining, *i.e.* either is deducible from the other, given the postulates and definitions of the system to which they belong; and there is no good reason for thinking, or indeed for hoping, that all the generalizations of the social sciences will eventually be expressible in this way, as theorems of deductive systems. Finally, there are two lessons in practical logic which need to be emphasized in connection with

the claim which we are here rebutting. (1) Whilst explanations of predictive pattern are naturally attractive to the historian on the score of explanatory completeness, they are just as naturally suspect to him on the score of accuracy and reliability. The reflective historian knows—in his bones even if he lacks the terminology needed to express it—that any motive-explanation of characteristically historical pattern which he offers for some action is likely to be far more reliable than the related motive explanation which claims predictive power: e.g. to infer that a wounding word would not have been spoken had not the speaker been jealous of another is almost always easier—and safer—than to claim that the utterance of it could have been predicted from the speaker's known jealous state of mind. (2) There is precisely the same danger in history proper as within the genetic sciences of the kind of "sham sufficiency" explanation which we exposed on page 393 above. The fact that a certain kind of motive provides us in a large number of instances with explanations of a characteristically historical pattern is by *itself* no warrant for the conclusion that by generalizing these instances we can obtain, or even come within reasonable hope of obtaining, an explanation possessing predictive power.

The upshot would therefore appear to be that historians will continue to employ characteristically historical explanations side by side with others of predictive pattern so long as history continues to be written. Yet, it would be unsatisfactory to leave the matter on this somewhat negative note; for it seems to me that the situation in which the reflective historian finds himself—the fact that he is at once drawn to and mistrustful of the ideal of explanatory completeness which the predictive generalizations of the social sciences seem to offer—may well help to illuminate a number of the most central and stubborn problems of philosophy. In particular the historian's situation has a very marked relevance to the age-old problem of the accountability and/or predictability of intelligent human conduct, since it enables us to regard this problem as a necessary consequence of the fact that there are *two* distinct ways—the predictive and the characteristically historical—in which we can be said to explain or to offer a reasoned account of any human action, and that the second of these ways is perfectly compatible with the continued use of the vulgar notion of accountability. Moreover, this way of regarding the predictability/accountability problem has the merit of rebutting the familiar criticism of the commonsense libertarian thesis, viz. that this thesis leaves "real choices" entirely unexplained in any acceptable sense of "explain"; for if our account of characteristically historical explanations be accepted it is perfectly possible for the intelligibility or rationality of an action to be explained, without any claim being made as to its actual or theoretical predictability.

To generalize from this example, I would urge that the distinction I have drawn between predictive and characteristically historical explanations provides philosophers with a valuable guide in their researches into the inner logic of motive-, purpose-, belief-, and other mental words. The line of research which I have in mind can perhaps be indicated by the following questions: (1) Can it be plausibly maintained that we learn to use motive-



and other mental words in the first instance not to predict but to explain in something like characteristically historical fashion certain observed physical actions? (2) If so, when motive- and other mental words come to be used for elementary predictive purposes also, how are their original meanings affected?—in the way of extended connotation, of greater precision, or of greater vagueness? (3) Assuming that any one clear answer can be given to this last question, does this answer hold good of our familiar mental words when they come to be employed for the relatively stringent predictive purposes of psychology—when they are subordinated to the over-riding quest of “the sufficient stimulus”? Researches conducted along this line of questioning might, I think, give some much-needed shape to those discussions of the logic of mental words which bulk so large in contemporary philosophy.

#### IV

In conclusion I should like to indicate very briefly the bearings of my account of characteristically historical explanations on two long-vexed problems in the philosophy of history: (1) the nature of the historian's interpretation of his documents, and (2) the kind of practical wisdom that can justly be attributed to the study of history.

(1) When a historian or epigraphist interprets a document he always looks, *inter alia*, for a characteristically historical explanation of it. This search may proceed at any of the following stages: (a) The historian has to satisfy himself that what he has before him is a meaningful document. This involves not only that the shapes he is presented with are formed and ordered in accordance with the conventions of some known language, and not only that the words and sentences he reads have sense in that language, but also—and this is what distinguishes the historian's from the linguist's interpretation—that this sense could not have belonged to the words unless they had been inscribed by someone who intended them to convey a recognizable meaning. (b) He must satisfy himself, on either internal or external evidence, that this meaningful document is in part at least veridical in intention, *i.e.* that it could not have been produced except by someone wishing to record some actual (or believed to be actual) happenings. (c) He must satisfy himself, usually on a combination of internal and external evidence, that his document is also in some degree, trustworthy, *i.e.* that it could not have been produced except by someone relatively well informed about the happenings that are described. Other stages or aspects of the historian's interpretation involve explanations of predictive type; *e.g.* he must satisfy himself that the material inscribed is of such a kind that it *could* date from the alleged time of inscription, and so on.

In at least these respects the document from which a historian usually, though by no means always, begins his reconstruction of the past, calls for characteristically historical explanation in precisely the same sense as do the events which that document is presumed to describe. Hence, it may,

on certain occasions, be difficult to decide whether a historian is seeking to explain in characteristically historical fashion some statement in his document or some past event which his document claims to have taken place. But this is by no means the typical case. Usually, the historian knows perfectly well when he is pondering over the character—as revealed in the characteristically historical explanation—of his document, and when he is pondering over the character—as revealed in the characteristically historical explanation—of some past event which is the primary object of his interest and study. There is, therefore, some slight excuse for the mystification which idealist philosophers of history have spread around the historian's task of interpretation. But there is no excuse for the way in which they have apparently delighted to jumble together things that are for common-sense perfectly distinct—the known past and the historian's present activity, the reasonableness or justification of some past deed and the reasonableness or justification of the historian's assessment of it.

(2) Certainly historical knowledge contributes indirectly to practical wisdom in as much as many—and in a wide sense all—of our predictive generalizations are based upon it. But many historians would claim that, irrespective of the practical guidance that can be obtained from the predictive generalizations of the social sciences, a "sense of history" is indispensable to the wise conduct of all human affairs; and I think my account of characteristically historical explanation helps us to see what is valid and important in this claim. Consider the kind of case in which a long series of actions is explained in characteristically historical fashion by reference to a continuously developing policy or to some complex movement of intellectual or religious ideas. Clearly such an explanation may contribute to the way in which the historian characterizes the whole period within which the actions in question fall. Equally clearly, where such an extension is justified, the policy or movement referred to will have contributed to the ways in which men actually thought and acted during the period: their practical appreciation of its value and indeed of its existence will have been a necessary condition of the ways they regarded their particular problems, and took and kept their bearings in meeting these problems. Here, I think, we have a clue to the kind of practical wisdom for which some knowledge and sense of history may rightly be claimed to be indispensable. This wisdom is naturally described as *conservative*, since it serves as a check to the radical experimentalist spirit (the spirit of Professor Popper's "Social Engineering"), which where given a free hand may indeed supply an effective solution to this or that practical problem, but may well do this at the cost of utterly transforming the general pattern of living within which these particular problems arose. Looked at from this point of view, therefore, "conservative wisdom" can be regarded as a generalization of the familiar moralist's warning against the dangers of shortsighted opportunism—against the slick move that saves the day but ruins the cause. There can, I think, be no doubt about the need for this kind of wisdom in all practical affairs, or about the dependence of this kind of wisdom upon a knowledge and sense of history.

This account of the matter, however, may easily be misconstrued;

certainly it does not provide us with a full explanation or justification of the kind of wisdom we are discussing. If it did, then even the wisest conservatism would be, as its radical detractors too often accuse it of being, an altogether backward-looking attitude. But conservatism is serious only in so far as it manifests its loyalty to certain inherited methods, principles, policies, etc., in its determination to embody these in its treatment of current and future problems; and it is positively wise only in so far as this determination stems from a reasoned judgment as to the applicability of inherited methods, policies, etc., to the changing political scene. Now judgment of this latter kind can seldom be equated with predictive knowledge: *e.g.* no one today can predict for any assignable future date the most probable consequences of maintaining free political and intellectual institutions in this country, yet determination to maintain such institutions can be accounted reasonable (*a*) in so far as they are seen to be necessary conditions of many other activities which we prize, and (*b*) in so far as none of the predictive knowledge we possess appears to preclude the possibility of their being maintained in their present form. On the other hand, we have here no reason for a blind or "anti-experimentalist" loyalty to inherited principles, policies, or institutions. A great policy or institution may well founder because opportunist radicals fail to appreciate its essential contribution to some general pattern of living; but it is just as likely to founder because unresourceful minds fail to adapt it to at least roughly predictable changes in the world for which it was framed. It would, therefore, be a complete mistake to regard the kind of conservative wisdom which we have been discussing as the preserve of backward-looking, anti-experimentalist or even Fabian spirits.

## WILLIAM DRAY

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WILLIAM DRAY was born at Montreal in 1921. He read Modern History at the University of Toronto from 1946 to 1949, and from 1949 until 1953 was at Balliol College, Oxford, where he took a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics and went on to do research in philosophy of history. From 1953 to 1955 he was Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Toronto, and from 1955 to 1956 Student of Nuffield College, Oxford. He is now Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. His publications include *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957) and contributions to the *Philosophical Quarterly* and *Mind*.

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## "Explaining What" in History\*

It is commonly held nowadays that the explanations given in all fields of enquiry, including history, have a common logical structure. Explanation, it is said, consists of the subsumption of what is to be explained under general law. To quote Professor Carl Hempel, "the assertion that a set of events—say of the kinds  $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ —have caused the event (E) to be explained, amounts to the statement that, according to certain general laws, a set of events of the kinds mentioned is regularly accompanied by an event of kind E."<sup>1</sup> I have argued elsewhere that this theory of explanation, which I call "the covering law model," does not provide a satisfactory analysis of the kinds of answers historians usually offer to "why" and "how" questions.<sup>2</sup> In what follows I should like to argue briefly for a similar conclusion with respect to a type of explanation which is not normally given in response to either of these kinds of questions.

In his *Short History of the British Commonwealth*, after describing some of the changes which took place in late 18th century England—the enclosure of agricultural lands, the beginnings of industrial production, the improvement of communications, etc.—Ramsey Muir observes: "It was not merely an economic change that was thus beginning; it was a social revolution."<sup>3</sup> The historian here makes no attempt to tell us either why or how the events under investigation came about. Yet the assertion, "It was a social revolution," is an explanation nevertheless.<sup>4</sup> It explains what happened as a social revolution. The question formulating the demand for such an explanation would employ the interrogative "What?" rather than "How?" or "Why?" The historian's problem is to discover *what it really was* that happened. And he deals with it by offering an explanation of the form, "It was a so-and-so."

No doubt there are many different sorts of "explanations what." To explain what happened, for instance, may sometimes mean to explain *why* what happened happened. And even in cases where it is difficult to regard the explanation as a covert answer to a "why" question, "explaining what" may take a form quite different from the one exemplified above; it may, for instance, require a detailed *account* of what happened. In the example noted, however, the problem is clearly not to discover new information,

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\*This article has not been published previously.

1. "The Function of General Laws in History," this volume, p. 345.

2. See my *Laws and Explanation in History*.

3. Vol. II (6th edn., London, 1937), p. 123.

4. It might perhaps be objected that what we are offered here would be called an interpretation rather than an explanation. Thus Professor S. Hook, in *The Hero in History*, tells us that Otto Bauer "interpreted the New Economic Policy introduced by Lenin as a partial return to capitalism." But I do not think that we need attach much significance to the distinction between explaining and interpreting in such cases, since "explained" could replace "interpreted" without difficulty.

not to provide further details, but rather to reorganize the detailed information already possessed; it is a matter of the synthesis rather than the analysis of what is to be explained. Indeed, explaining what a thing is, where this means explaining it as a so-and-so, might be characterized in a preliminary way as explanation by means of a general concept rather than a general law. For the explanation is given by finding a satisfactory *classification* of what seems to require explanation.

## II

Some philosophers, while agreeing that explanation may at times be given by means of a concept, would deny that the logical structure of such explanation differs essentially from subsumption under law. Thus, according to Professor Hempel, "what is sometimes, misleadingly, called an explanation by means of a certain *concept* is, in empirical science, actually an explanation in terms of *universal hypotheses* containing that concept."<sup>5</sup> Hempel's qualification, "in empirical science," is not intended to restrict the application of his doctrine to the natural sciences, for he considers that history, too, is, or should be, empirical science. The limited scope of the qualification shows itself in the sentence which follows the one just quoted, in which we are warned: "explanations involving concepts which do not function in empirically tested hypotheses—such as 'entelechy' in biology, 'historical destination of a race' or 'self-unfolding of absolute reason' in history—are mere metaphors without cognitive content." All that Hempel means to rule out, apparently, are concepts which, in his opinion, have no empirical meaning at all. Any explanation given by means of an empirically respectable concept will necessarily subsume what is to be explained under general law.

In the light of what I have said about "explaining what," let me try to show why I think it a mistake to claim in this way that all explanations in terms of concepts are reducible to explanations in terms of laws. And to avoid, at any rate at first, the suspicion of employing "metaphors without cognitive content," let me consider that claim with respect to the explanatory use of the ordinary empirical concept "revolution."

It is Hempel's contention that if a concept has explanatory force, this can only be because the explanation making use of it covertly subsumes what is being explained under a law "containing" the concept. Presumably the law which lurks in the background when something is explained "as a revolution" is one which would contain the concept in its apodosis; for the role of an explanatory covering law is to show, by reference to certain other (and usually antecedent) events and conditions, that what is to be explained could have been predicted. But to explain, say, what happened in France in 1789 "as a revolution" would surely not be equivalent to bringing it under any law of the form, "Whenever  $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$  then a revolution." For to apply the concept does not *necessarily* represent the

5. *Op. cit.*, this volume, p. 350, n. 3.

explicandum as the sort of thing which follows a certain type of antecedent event or condition, whether stated or merely understood.

Indeed, the whole question of the predictability, the necessity, of what is explained simply does not arise as part of the explanatory problem in the sort of case envisaged here—the sort of case in which "It was a revolution" would count as an explanation in ordinary historical writing. Even if it were admitted, for the sake of argument, that explaining why something happened requires the specification of conditions from which what happened could have been predicted, and that such prediction commits the investigator to the truth of some covering law, it would thus still be a mistake to regard the covering law theory as setting forth a generally necessary condition of explanation. For explaining what a thing is, i.e. how it should be regarded, is just not the same enterprise at all as explaining why it (whatever it may have been) happened, or why it ran the course it did, or how it came about, or how it could have happened in the light of so-and-so. There is nothing wrong with these questions except that, in the sort of context under discussion, they are *further* questions—questions which the explanatory statement makes no attempt to answer.

It is true that the applicability of an explanatory concept *may*, in some cases, be judged appropriate by an investigator because he recognizes that some law or laws are instantiated by what is to be explained. This is most likely to be so in cases where the term in question is drawn from the technical vocabulary of some auxiliary science. We are told by Professor Marie Swabey, for instance, that Lenin's fame rested on his sure-footed diagnosis of the February 1917 uprising in Russia "as a bourgeois revolution."<sup>6</sup> At least part of what Lenin would have regarded as his justification for the classification, "bourgeois revolution," would have been his conclusion, in the light of his general theory of the historical process, that certain results had accrued in accordance with certain laws. Thus, in explaining the February uprising "as a bourgeois revolution," Lenin quite deliberately, although not in so many words, brings what happened under covering law. Indeed, from his assertion that it was a bourgeois revolution, it could be *deduced* that its antecedents were of a certain general character, for these have been written into the meaning of the technical term which Lenin employs. But to admit that explanation-by-concept *may* sometimes in *fact* subsume the explicandum under law is not at all to commit oneself to the view that such subsumption is generally necessary. For not all classificatory terms require the recognition of what they apply to as satisfying the apodosis clause of some valid law. "Revolution," as used in the ordinary language of social description, is surely a case in point. To generalize from the use of concepts which do, indeed, have laws built into them is to attempt to support covering law theory by appealing to special cases.

It might be pointed out, too, that the appeal to such cases is itself not entirely without danger for an attempt to enhance the plausibility of the covering law doctrine. For even where laws *are* built into the explanatory concepts used, it is important to realize that the laws in question need not

6. *The Judgement of History* (New York, 1954), pp. 154-5.

be the kind envisaged by Professor Hempel in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper. The covering law theory maintains that the explanatory law must be one which allows the explicandum to fall under its apodosis clause. But the application of a strictly defined concept like "bourgeois revolution" may just as well involve us in the recognition of laws which contain the explicandum in their *protasis* clauses. For we may judge the applicability of a concept by noticing what comes *after*, as well as what comes before, that to which it is said to apply. We see the significance of historical events by noticing what they *lead to*, as well as what they arise out of. If a covering law theorist should deny this—if he should deny that eliciting the significance of events in this sense has anything to do with "explanation"—then it will begin to appear that an independently established theory of explanation as subsumption under laws allowing the prediction of the explained event is being *applied to*, rather than discovered in, explanations ordinarily given by means of concepts.

It seems to me preferable to admit that explanation-by-concept is something quite different from "prediction upside down." There is a kind of generality in it, no doubt, but it is not essentially the generality involved in representing something as what could have been predicted in the light of so-and-so. The difference between explaining something as a so-and-so, and the pattern of covering law theory, might, indeed, be put in terms of two different senses in which philosophers speak of "generalizing." When exponents of the covering law model speak of explanatory generalization, they have in mind a situation in which what is to be explained is a *y* preceded by an *x*, and the generalization in question would be of the form: "Whenever *x* then *y*." But if there is any generalization essential to the kind of explanation I have called "explaining what," it would have to be of a quite different form. For what is to be explained is a collection of happenings or conditions, *x*, *y* and *z*; and the relevant generalization would be of the form: "*X*, *y* and *z* amount to a *Q*." Such an explanatory generalization is summative; it allows us to refer to *x*, *y* and *z* collectively as "a so-and-so." And historians find it intellectually satisfying to be able to represent the events and conditions they study as related in this way.

### III

In considering "explanations what" given by means of a concept like "revolution," it is necessary to admit at least this much "regularity" in the explanation: that what happened, since it is described by a classificatory term drawn from the ordinary language of social description, is a recurring social phenomenon at the level of generalization indicated by the term used. My purpose in considering such a case was to show that even so, this "regularity" does not support the claim that the explanation necessarily subsumes what is to be explained under covering law.

7. This is the sense of "generalize" employed by Professor M. Oakeshott when he writes: "... historical individuals are themselves a product of generalization, though not ... of scientific generalization." *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 160.

But it is important to add that explanations of this sort are not always given by means of a concept whose use implies that what is explained is a recurring social phenomenon. For historians often draw attention to an intelligible pattern in their subject matter by applying (or, it may be said, "stretching") concepts from other fields. They speak, for instance, of "the evolution of Parliament," explaining a host of details of parliamentary history "as an evolution." Or they speak of "The Renaissance" or "The Enlightenment," explaining a certain range of facts, drawn from 15th or 18th century European history, "as a rebirth" or "as an intellectual illumination." In reaching for concepts beyond the social field, i.e. in using analogies, the explanation of what happened "as a so-and-so" no longer allows us to say that what is explained is a recurring social phenomenon. There may have been many revolutions, but there may have been only one Age of Enlightenment. Yet if this were so, it would not at all diminish the explanatory value of the concept for historians of 18th century Europe.

Covering law theorists may be inclined to write off such explanatory concepts as "metaphors"—the sort of thing to be expected from "literary" historians. But it should be noted that the metaphors in question cannot, like those cited by Professor Hempel, be dismissed as devoid of empirical content. They have, in fact, empirical justification, for their propriety rests upon their emphasizing certain empirically discernible features of the subject matter which are deemed important. In a way logically analogous to the use of concepts like "revolution," they allow the historian to bring a wide range of facts into a system or pattern, although not necessarily into a pattern which recurs in the social field.

Mr. W. H. Walsh, who is one of the few recent philosophers of history to emphasize the role of large-scale connecting or unifying concepts in introducing "intelligibility" into historical material, has called this explanatory procedure "colligation under appropriate conceptions."<sup>8</sup> The historian, he says, conceives it his task "to look for certain dominant concepts or leading ideas by which to illuminate his facts, to trace connections between those ideas themselves, and then to show how the detailed facts become intelligible in the light of them by constructing a 'significant narrative' of the events of the period in question."<sup>9</sup> He illustrates his meaning by referring to Russell's "colligation" of English 19th century political history in terms of "Freedom and Organization."

According to Mr. J. W. N. Watkins, such a procedure yields "less than a full explanation of the events colligated"; it is a procedure "which is important not because it is methodologically powerful, but because most 'literary' historians do in fact use it..."<sup>10</sup> And Walsh himself, in his *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, remarks that "colligation needs to

8. On this see "The Intelligibility of History," *Philosophy*, 1942, pp. 133-5; "The Character of An Historical Explanation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol., 1947, pp. 51-2; *Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London, 1951), pp. 59-64.

9. *Introduction to Philosophy of History*, p. 62.

10. "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation," reprinted in Feigl, H., and Scriven, M., *Readings in the Philosophy of Science* (New York, 1953), p. 733.



be supplemented by further processes if historical explanation is to be complete."<sup>11</sup> But, if my analysis is correct, it is surely necessary to protest that colligatory explanations, insofar as they provide satisfactory unifying concepts, *can* be perfectly complete explanations of *their type*—i.e. as answers to "what" rather than to "why" questions. The complaint that colligation is not "methodologically powerful" betrays an illegitimate approach to the appraisal of such explanations. It expresses dissatisfaction with the question asked, rather than with the answer to it which colligatory explanation provides.

## CHARLES FRANKEL

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## Explanation and Interpretation in History\*

Historians, philosophers, and men of affairs frequently raise questions about the "meaning" of history, or of selected segments of history, and frequently disagree about the relative merits of competing interpretations

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11. P. 63. According to Walsh, it needs to be completed by explanations applying generalizations from a "science of human nature."

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of specific historical periods or of the historical process as a whole. Such discussions are anything but idle. They affect what historians and others say about the past, and, in doing so, they influence the construction of social policies in the present. Indeed, they affect the very quality of a culture. For the view that a group of people hold towards their past is one of the controlling factors in their morals, religion, art, and intellectual pursuits, to say nothing of the sights, sounds, and actual feel of their daily experience.

Of late the concern with interpretations of history has been growing. Not only laymen and philosophers but professional historians as well have become increasingly interested in general interpretations of history. Even more, many historians have begun to emphasize the impossibility of avoiding an element of subjective "interpretation" in any account or explanation of past events. Thus, to take one representative example of this view, Charles Beard and Alfred Vagts have written,

Any definition of a complicated aggregation of events, conditions, and personalities in history-as-actuality, such as the French Revolution or the American Revolution, is an arbitrary delimitation in time and space—an isolation of the "data" in the mind or the imagination, not outside the mind or the imagination (as in chemistry, for example). . . .<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I wish to consider some questions relating to the general nature of explanation and interpretation in history. What is the relationship between an "interpretation" of an historical event, in which we try to state its meaning or value, and an "explanation" of that event, in which we try to say how it was connected with other events and why it happened as it did? What sort of issue is raised when we speak of the "meaning" of historical events, and what sort of evidence can we give to support such statements when we make them? What, if any, are the standards by which we can appraise the relative merits of competing interpretations of history? Finally, does it make any sense to speak of being objective with respect to interpretations of history?

## I

It will be useful first to review briefly certain basic considerations about the nature of historical explanation.

Although books on history usually contain at least a few explicit generalizations about human behavior or the relations of social institutions to one another, they contain for the most part singular statements asserting the occurrence of unique events at specific places and times.<sup>2</sup> No matter how much an historian may give in to his itch to generalize, we should all be

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1. Social Science Research Council, *Theory and Practice in Historical Study*, New York, 1946, p. 136n.

2. Needless to say, the "unique events" whose occurrence is asserted may range from complex institutional structures such as European feudalism through styles in art such as the Gothic to individual personalities such as Napoleon.

surprised if the basic currency of his work were not names, dates, and places, and if he did not in the main give an account of individual events that have occurred once and only once.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the historian is primarily concerned with making singular statements, it is misleading to believe that explanation in history is radically different from explanation in other fields. In the first place, there are many natural sciences such as geology, for example, which are also predominantly concerned with discovering individual occurrences that have taken place at some particular place and time; and even generalizing sciences like physics have, after all, an inescapable reference to *this* world, as it happens contingently to shape up, and not to any possible world. In the second place, beliefs that are general in character, and refer to recurrent properties of events, have to be taken into account on at least two levels within history itself. To begin with, general beliefs about the physical world, human nature, and social structure have to be invoked to justify the inferences we draw about the past from the skimpy traces that the past leaves in the present. The historian has to make use of such beliefs when he determines the authenticity of the documents, traditions, reports, and the like with which his work begins, and draws the inference that the existence of such and such an item in the present implies the occurrence of such and such an event in the past. Thus generalizations taken over from chemistry, for example, are now regularly employed in determining the age and authenticity of manuscripts. And when the historian goes on to the second level, and tries to construct a connected story out of his materials, he has equally to depend on beliefs about the ways in which the *types* of events he is reporting are generally related to one another. These and other considerations, such as the obvious one that history has to be written in a language, and that any language must contain general terms, would seem to suggest that historical explanation, like causal explanations in other fields, involves an at least implicit appeal to regularities and recurrences, and is similar in its fundamental logic to explanations anywhere else.

However there are certain distinctive features of historical inquiry which create difficulties in applying this general picture of explanation to what the historian actually does. And it is in part because these special problems arise in the writing of history that the view exists that historical explanation is radically different from other kinds of explanation, and that an incorrigibly subjective element of "interpretation" creeps into all historical explanations. These problems must be taken into account, I think, in any view of historical explanation lest, on the one side, we over-estimate the actual accomplishments of historians, or, on the other side, dismiss these accomplishments out of hand because they fail to meet wholly unrealistic standards. It is questionable, however, that these distinctive features of historical inquiry justify the view that historical explanation is something whose logic is special or discontinuous from the logic of disciplined inquiry elsewhere.

(1) Consider, first, the fairly obvious fact that historical explanations, more than is the case in many fields, neither offer nor clearly presuppose precise, finished generalizations from which the actual events recorded can

in fact be inferred. As Professor Hempel has pointed out, they offer rather "explanation sketches" whose details would have to be filled in before they actually permitted us to deduce the events in question; and the filling in of these details is not usually in the power of the historian.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, it is usually harder in history than it is in other domains to justify the counterfactual statements that are involved in making causal imputations in any field. Would the French Revolution have been different if Rousseau had not written *The Social Contract*? Would the Reconstruction period after the Civil War have been different if Booth, like most would-be assassins, had been a poor shot? Plainly, when we impute causal influences of a certain type to Rousseau or Lincoln we assume that these questions would be answered in the affirmative. But it is not easy to marshal evidence that convincingly supports these assumptions. Accordingly, it must be said that the proofs which historians can actually provide for the explanations they offer is frequently of a comparatively low order, and that a dose of skepticism is in place with respect to many of the explanations historians give.

However, it is of equal importance to see that what these features of historical explanation point to is a contingent fact about the state of the historian's knowledge, and not a necessary or unavoidable limitation on what he can do. They do not show that there is a firm line between history and sciences in which generally accepted, objective explanations can be attained. They point to the need for filling in the details of sketchy generalizations, or to the historian's ignorance of many facts; more generally, they point to our present poverty with respect to firm and reliable generalizations about human affairs, and to the manifest difficulties of getting at past facts about the human scene by way of the skimpy, and often distorted, traces they leave in the present. But with respect to any specific historical occurrence, these are empirical and contingent states of affairs; they are not unalterable logical necessities.

(2) Even more striking, however, is the fact that historical explanations, even apart from the sketchiness of the generalizations employed, usually do not have a predictive (or retrodictive) value. They state essential conditions for the occurrence of an event, but not the sufficient conditions. Thus, if we ask why the Estates General was convened in France in 1789, and are told that the King was bankrupt, or if we ask why there was agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws in nineteenth-century Britain, and are told that the price of bread was too high, we regard these as explanations of the events in question, and as answers to the questions we have asked. But each of these answers, at best, only states conditions without which the events in question would not have taken place. They do not state conditions from which it is possible to deduce exactly what did take place. For example, we might infer from the bankruptcy of the French King that

3. Carl Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX (1942), reprinted in this volume, p. 344 ff., above. It should be made clear, of course, that Professor Hempel introduces the concept of "explanation sketches" as part of an argument showing the essential continuity, rather than the discontinuity, of historical explanation with explanation in other sciences.

some sort of drastic measure would be taken. But we cannot infer solely from the fact that the King of France was bankrupt that he would convene the Estates General, or solely from the fact that the price of bread was high in Victorian England that industrial capitalists and workers would agitate for repeal of the Corn Laws.

It is true, of course, that the notion of finding the full set of essential and sufficient conditions for an event states an ideal which is not fully attained in many domains. Nevertheless, the fact that historical explanations often do not have a predictive power does significantly differentiate historical explanations from other explanations. Indeed, what is interesting is not that historical explanation fails to meet an ideal of full explanation, but rather that, on many occasions, it seems fully to satisfy our demand for an explanation. It seems to be the case sometimes that when we ask for an explanation of a given phenomenon, what we want, and are satisfied to get, is an account of the stages of a process, the last stage of which is the phenomenon in the shape in which it exhibits those traits about which we have asked our question. This is one of the stable and accepted meanings of "explanation" in ordinary usage. The fact that historical explanations frequently, and perhaps characteristically, state only the essential but not the sufficient conditions of events, and that they are regarded all the same as satisfactory explanations, suggests, in other words, that not all satisfactory explanations supply us with exactly the same type of information, and that not all requests to have something explained are unequivocal requests for a single kind of answer.

However, this point, while it may keep us from imposing irrelevant standards on the work of historians, does not destroy the conclusion that historical explanation is a normal type of causal explanation. For in the first place, this sort of distinctively "historical" explanation occurs in other domains—e.g., embryology—as well as in that study of the sequence of human affairs over the last six thousand years which is normally called "history." And in the second place, the statement of the stages of a process, or of essential conditions for the occurrence of an event, rests as much as does a fully predictive explanation on tacit or expressed generalizations. Otherwise we could not distinguish between a mere succession of events and a series of connected events. For it is only in terms of generalizations to the effect that events of a given type do not take place unless they are conjoined with other events of a given type that we are able to say what we mean by an "historical process," or separate one historical process from another—in short, that we are able to make the basic sort of statement that is inescapable in writing history.

(3) Similar conclusions apply to another kind of statement that is frequent in writing history. Many historical explanations do not actually seem to be attempts to state even the essential conditions that have determined an event. Frequently, they are much more limited attempts to state only what was "primary" or "most important" in bringing about the event in question. Such statements are frequently vague or ambiguous. But one reason for this is that there seem to be a number of meanings of "primary"

or "most important," and that historians frequently oscillate from one to another in the course of giving a single explanation. The exact character of what they are asserting, therefore, and the evidence for it, cannot be easily specified. Furthermore, even when the nature of their assertions can be definitely determined, the actual evidence they have at their disposal for supporting these claims is frequently, and perhaps usually, discouragingly inadequate. Again, however, this does not show that vagueness and confusion are inevitable in what historians say, or that it is impossible for them to be clear about what they mean to assert.<sup>4</sup>

(4) However, it has sometimes been said, and it is probably much more frequently believed, that there is something both unrealistic and irrelevant in demanding that the historian avoid ambiguity and vagueness in what he is saying. It is pointed out (for example, by Mr. Isaiah Berlin in his *Historical Inevitability*) that the language of the historian is the language of ordinary speech, and that his statements are not embedded in a conceptual system which has definite and precise rules for applying and testing it. Moreover, it is said that we do not in fact want or expect the historian to speak a specialized scientific language; on the contrary, it is his specific contribution to speak about the bewildering complexity of human affairs in the ordinary, loose, accommodating, practical language in which they are actually carried on. Thus, in his illuminating book, *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, Mr. Patrick Gardiner has written:

There is something fishy about asking the historian questions of a type we should feel justified in asking a theoretical or practical scientist. . . . [The historian's] aim is to talk about what happened on particular occasions in all its variety, all its richness, and his terminology is adapted to this object. That is the reason why terms like "revolution" are left so vague and so open. They are accommodating terms, able to cover a vast number of events falling within an indefinitely circumscribed range. . . . Generalizations about revolutions, class-struggles, civilizations, must inevitably be vague, open to a multitude of exceptions and saving clauses, because of the looseness of the terms they employ. . . . But this is not to criticize such generalizations provided that they are not expected to do more work than they are fitted for. The scientific model of precise correlation is misleading in any attempt to comprehend the role of these generalizations in history, where they function frequently as *guides to understanding*.<sup>5</sup>

There is some substance to this point of view. The usual historian, it may be said, uses generalizations in precisely the unexpressed and porous way in which practical men do so; and just as we do not judge the performance of the practical man by the generalizations he utters (and may even have our suspicions of his practicality aroused by such generalizations), but rather by

4. Five meanings of "primary" or "most important" have been analyzed by Ernest Nagel, "The Logic of Historical Analysis," *The Scientific Monthly*, 74, 1952, reprinted in this volume, p. 383 ff., above.

5. Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 53, 60-61.

the specific decisions he makes, so we judge the performance of the historian, not by the rigor of his theories, but by the account he gives of concrete affairs. Thus, it is frequently misleading to take statements such as "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," when historians use them, as attempts to give an exact statement of a universal law. For the first part of this statement is clearly false if taken strictly as a universal statement (e.g., Lincoln); and the second part asserts the existence of something—absolute power—which in fact never does exist. But such remarks may be taken as statements of strategy, rules to which it is best to conform in the absence of very strong countervailing considerations. They represent "common sense" or "wisdom" rather than "science," and in many circumstances it is perhaps preferable to be guided by such principles in judgments about the practical affairs of men rather than by principles which possess a higher order of generality and exactness but which are also more rigid, remote, and abstract. It is both important and true to say, therefore, that we may wish to apply standards to the work of historians over and above the standards that follow the model of the theoretical sciences. We may properly admire a history even though its conceptual framework is vague or banal; and we may consider it unsatisfactory even though the generalizations it employs are all precise, profound, and true. Indeed, over and above the explanations an historian gives, whether "common-sensical" or "scientific," we want him to tell a story well and to make it come to life.

However, this does not seem to me to mean that "generalizations about revolutions, class-struggles, civilizations, must *inevitably* be vague," or that history stops being history, or doing the only thing we want it to do, when it forsakes the vague language of common sense for the tighter and more refined vocabulary of science. For if the looseness of terms like "revolution" or "feudalism" is a function of their use apart from a firm theoretical framework, then it is not *inevitable* that statements employing such terms be vague. And if it be said that precise theoretical explanations of what has happened in human affairs are not properly called history but something else, then the question arises as to how to classify what it is that Marx or Max Weber, however unsuccessful they may have been, were trying to do. Most important, what can or cannot be said in ordinary language depends on the state of that language; and this is a shifting thing. Ordinary language has in fact been repeatedly influenced by developments in theoretical science; and what it has thereby gained in precision it has not invariably lost in flexibility. There are important distinctions between the logic of theoretical judgments and the logic of practical judgments; but the separation between the two is not as firm as Mr. Gardiner's statement appears to make it. And the consequence of establishing such a firm separation may well be the erection of an additional and unnecessary barrier to the application of theory to practice, and to the illumination and improved control of practice that might thereby result.<sup>6</sup>

6. Of course, if we ever did achieve a body of solid theory adequate for explaining human behavior, this theory might be formulated in a special language remote from ordinary language and from the language that is now regarded as the language of historiography. Accordingly, we might not be inclined to regard the explanations that

(5) This point touches, however, on another issue of importance. Many or most of the generalizations historians employ seem to enjoy a very curious status. On the one hand, it always seems possible to find counter-instances to them; on the other hand, the historian seems to cling to a given generalization and to continue to use it for the specific case at issue even in the face of these counter-instances. And in defending his generalization, he does so, not by showing that it derives from a more embracing scheme of generalizations, but rather by filling in the actual details of the concrete situation to which he is applying it. Thus, an historian may say, for example, that the cause of Louis XIV's unpopularity at his death was his severe tax policies. But if we produce counter-instances against the generalization that severe tax policies cause unpopularity, the historian does not ordinarily relinquish this explanation. Rather, he tells us more and more about the actual story of Louis XIV's reign, in the apparent conviction that if we knew all the relevant details we should become convinced of the truth of his explanation.

For this reason, many historians and philosophers of history are inclined to believe that the generalizations that seem to be operative in the writing of history are in fact specious generalizations. When all the restrictions and qualifications are in, they suggest, these generalizations are in reality disguised singular statements. For example, what exactly is the generalization that lies behind a statement of historical causation such as "Cleopatra's beauty caused Mark Antony to linger in Egypt"? Are all generals susceptible to beauty? On the record, it is doubtful. Did Cleopatra's beauty cause all visiting dignitaries to linger in Egypt? The evidence is negative. Was Mark Antony always so affected by the sight of beauty as he was by Cleopatra's? It seems unlikely that he could have had the career he did have if this were so. And is it always for reasons of love that generals fail to move their armies in time? Unhappily, they frequently have less admirable reasons. And so it seems that we must progressively introduce more and more restrictions, until in the end our "generalization" is merely the statement, "If a man exactly like Mark Antony falls in love with a woman exactly like Cleopatra, and in exactly the same circumstances and at just the same time that Mark Antony actually did fall in love with

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such a theory provided as cases of what is now called "historical explanation." In this sense, it is clearly true to say that it *may* be impossible to write history in terms of rigorous and exact statements of laws, if by "history" is meant a discipline whose results are expressed in what is now ordinary language. However, this is at least in part a terminological issue. Whether or not we used the term "historical" to characterize the explanations derived from such high-level theories, they would in fact provide explanations of the same events that are now putatively explained by historians. And since we are usually willing to call an explanation a "better" explanation when the generalizations it invokes are more exact, systematic, and embracing, such explanations would be "better" explanations, in at least one sense of the term, than those which historians can now provide. It should be added immediately, however, that a history written in such a specialized language as is here envisaged, if "history" it be called, could hardly be expected to replace history as it is now understood. We would still wish *also* to talk about what has happened in human affairs in the everyday language in which those affairs are actually conducted. To keep only a high-level theoretical explanation of human affairs and to dispense with history written in ordinary language would be like having only a micro-physics and no macro-physics. (The specific analogy has been suggested to me by Ernest Nagel.)



Cleopatra, then this man will linger in Egypt." And so it is sometimes argued that the causal relations which are asserted by historians really involve no appeal to generalizations. The relation involved is one between two unique events, and unlike causal imputations in other fields, nothing is presupposed about invariant or even statistically frequent relations between events of given types.

The facts, however, do not necessitate this interpretation. (1) To begin with, historians in fact do sometimes change the explanations they offer when counter-instances are produced, or when embracing psychological theories like Freud's or sociological theories like Marx's are produced. (2) Further, most historical generalizations do not seem attempts to state invariant relations, but only correlations of a significant frequency. Hence the historian feels free to cling to his generalization even though counter-instances may be produced. The difficulty in refuting such generalizations does not lie in the fact that they are disguised singular statements. It lies in the fact that the imputed frequency of the relation in question is left highly indeterminate. (3) Again, the historian's continued commitment to his generalization in the face of apparent negative evidence seems frequently to be a case of his supplying hitherto missing restrictive clauses, so that the apparent counter-instances are shown not really to apply to the class of events in question. This is one reason why the historian fills out the details when called upon to defend his explanation of an event. And the difficulty again is not that these restrictions must inevitably lead in the end to a mere singular statement, but rather that they are usually understood only vaguely at the beginning, and come to be progressively sharpened as we go along. (4) One particular sub-class of the "missing restrictive clause" type of statement is worth noting by itself. Difficulties sometimes arise involving the specification of so-called "essential conditions" for an event. There is a sense in which we sometimes speak of "essential conditions" such that, given an event *E* which does not occur unless *either* condition *X* or condition *Y* are present, we may speak of *X* as being an "essential condition" for *E*. This sort of issue arises in many fields, but is particularly frequent in historiography. (Thus, to take a simple example, the essential, though not the sufficient, conditions for the desegregation of schools in the United States include a Supreme Court decision or joint action on the part of State legislatures. In fact, a Supreme Court decision was the essential condition for the present process of desegregation; but such a process could in principle occur without a Supreme Court decision.) Accordingly, the statement that *X* was "essential" for *E* is not necessarily falsified by producing evidence that *E* sometimes occurs without *X*. Under such circumstances, however, an historian may well give the impression that he is persisting in an explanation in the face of apparently negative evidence, and that the generalization to which he is appealing is only a spurious one. And this impression is frequently heightened by the fact that the generalization is expressed in loose terms, and that the historian may not have indicated, or even be aware, that there are alternative "essential conditions" for the occurrence of the event in question. Nevertheless, the explanation he offers may in fact be a

sound one, and involve a genuine generalization.<sup>7</sup> (5) Finally, at least some of the generalizations that historians employ, and particularly those involving expressions like "the Puritan mind," "the Prussian officer," "the Victorian business man," seem to have the status of methodological rules for organizing specific materials under inquiry. Such rules exist in other domains when inquiry has reached a certain stage of development; and the inquirer retains them for use in a specific, delimited area even though they do not apply outside that area. What seems to distinguish history in this respect from other sorts of inquiry is only that the boundaries within which such regulative principles apply are not clearly set. Indeed, the existence and usefulness of such principles in history is worth stressing, since many historians are in the habit of saying that the major intellectual contribution of history lies in exposing such "abstractions."

## II

It would appear, therefore, that wholesale skepticism about historical explanations is not justified, at any rate by any of the considerations examined above; nor does the view seem to be justified that historical explanation is something whose logic is special and distinctive. Despite certain special features of historical inquiry, such inquiry seems to be similar at bottom to other kind of empirical inquiry, and does not fit into a distinct category of its own. Nevertheless, such considerations as those that have been raised do not apparently succeed in arriving at one of the principal issues affecting the claims of history to be an objective and impersonal discipline. It is frequently said that "even the most scrupulous honesty on the part of the historian cannot prevent his viewpoint from coloring the historical picture."<sup>8</sup> It is held, that is to say, that over and above the "explanations" the historian gives he cannot help providing an over-all "interpretation" of events as well, that this "interpretation" affects even the actual "explanations" he gives, and that objectivity in history, accordingly, is a will-o'-the-wisp.

What are the reasons for this widely held point of view? Leaving aside a variety of assumptions attached to general philosophic positions (such as notions about the relations of parts to wholes, the alleged necessity for "ontological" premises to any inquiry, and the claim that a unique logic is involved in any scrutiny of human affairs) there is one significant and inescapable fact about historical explanations, which must be recognized by any scrupulous observer, whatever his philosophy, and which seems to support this point of view. It seems to be the case that an element of "interpretation," a judgment about events that is governed by the historian's values, frequently controls his writing of history, not simply in his choosing and delimiting the story he tells,

7. This point has been put, of course, in an intentionally simplified way. The case is strengthened when we consider that usually the historian is confronted by more than two alternatives, and that these alternatives are not precisely defined *legal* conditions (as in the example above) but elements in complex empirical states of affairs.

8. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, New York, 1949, pp. 117-18.

nor even in the moral judgment he passes on it, but in *the actual imputation of causal connections*.

How, in fact, may an historian's moral or social commitments, even assuming that he succeeds as far as it is possible in divesting himself of bias, affect the actual causal explanations he gives? In imputing causes in history, the term "cause" is employed perhaps most frequently in the way in which we use it in common-sense or practical affairs, where we are trying to control a specific situation. In these affairs we normally use the term "cause" to designate that factor in a situation which, if it can be manipulated, will produce a desired or adequate result. The "cause" of forest fires, we say for example, is human carelessness, though forest fires would not take place if forests were always damp; or again, the cause of traffic accidents is bad roads or human negligence, though traffic accidents would not take place if there were no automobiles. Similarly, in history an historian may say that the German invasion of Belgium was "the cause" of Great Britain's entrance into World War I, although Great Britain would not have entered World War I if she had had no interest in Belgium or any treaty with that country. As such examples indicate, when causal imputations between an event C and another event E are made in this way, they are made by tacitly setting aside factors which are necessary for the occurrence of that event, but which are regarded as fixed or unmanipulable, from another set of factors, which are or were allegedly subject to change or control, and which are designated as the "causes" of that event. Accordingly, the assertion of a causal relation in practical affairs or in history frequently rests either on an assumption of fact or a stipulation of value. Either certain variables are assumed, in fact, to have been unmanipulable; or it is tacitly stipulated that certain variables *should* not be manipulated. And when this latter sort of stipulation enters, an element of interpretation seems to be present in the actual content of the historian's causal explanations. Thus, where Englishmen were inclined to say that the cause of Britain's entry into World War I was the German invasion of Belgium, because this seemed to them the manipulable factor, the German foreign minister expressed his shocked incredulity that Britain should set a general war loose merely on account of a scrap of paper, because the British treaty with Belgium seemed to him manipulable while the conditions which German military strategy had to face did not. And when larger issues arise, for example, as to the causes of war, and one group of historians puts it down to an imbalance of power, and another group to the prevailing property-system, similar issues are usually involved concerning what should be regarded as fixed and what as variable in a given state of affairs. Thus the conclusion seems to follow that explanation and interpretation in history are inextricably intertwined, and that even the most impassive historian cannot wholly succeed in keeping his values from affecting the actual account he gives of events.

We come, therefore, to the general question of the nature and logic of the sort of thing that is called "interpreting" history. What is it we are doing when we interpret history, and how does it relate to historical explanation?

Examples of interpretations of history are abundant:

(1) "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." (The Communist Manifesto)

(2) "Civilizations are nothing but . . . efforts to move on from . . . the accomplished fact of Human Nature to another nature, super-human or divine, which is the unattained goal of human endeavors." (Arnold Toynbee)

(3) "In History . . . I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave; only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations; only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen." (H. A. L. Fisher)

(4) "As I see it, the function of the nineteenth century was to disengage the disinterested intelligence, to release it from the entanglements of party and sect—one might almost add of sex—and to set it operating over the whole range of human life and circumstance." (G. M. Young)

These examples illustrate three characteristic ways in which we speak of an "interpretation of history." (1) An interpretation of history may assert that some variable or group of variables—*e.g.*, economics, geography, technology—are the most important causal agencies in history. (2) An interpretation of history may state the meaning or purpose of history as a whole, showing that all historical occurrences subservise some final goal or ideal. Usually this sort of interpretation of history also offers an interpretation of history in the first sense as well; but it goes farther than such interpretations by providing a moral justification of what has happened in history. (3) An interpretation of history may tell us what the "meaning" or "function" of a given historical sequence or set of institutions are. Thus, historians frequently argue about the meaning of Greek civilization, or of the Enlightenment, or of the Bolshevik Revolution. Let us consider each of these kinds of "interpretation" in turn.

(1) So far as I can see, the first kind of interpretation of history presents no general difficulties, but only the specific, though usually overwhelming, difficulty of actually marshalling evidence for any specific interpretation that may be offered. At their most ambitious, such interpretations of history are attempts to offer a comprehensive theory as a framework for explaining what has happened in human affairs. In the formulation of this theory, a specific variable (*e.g.*, property-systems, geographical location, climate) plays a fundamental role. Since such theories, if they were adequately warranted, would obviously rest on embracing considerations about human psychology or sociology, the force of the explanations they offered would be greater than that provided by ideas of a lower order of generality. To put this in other terms, the "necessity" of the specific causal relations that were asserted by histories written in terms of such theories would be greater because they would be logically related, in terms of the laws embodied in the theory, to a wider range of other events.

When they are less ambitious, such interpretations of history need not be regarded as attempts to formulate a finished theory, but only as attempts to provide guides to research. They offer the advice that if the historian looks into the relation of events to a variable of a given kind, his research is more likely

to yield fruitful results; and the test of such advice, obviously, is whether this is so. In this more modest, but not unimportant, sense, the idea of the economic interpretation of history, for example, is clearly one of the seminal ideas of the nineteenth century.

It should be noted, incidentally, that such interpretations of history, whether taken strictly or loosely, need by no means be monistic or "one-cause" explanations. They may help explain a given event only in connection with other, independent variables; but while these other variables may differ from situation to situation, the key variable in question, if the interpretation of history that is offered is sound, must be invoked in all or most situations. Thus, in saying that an economic interpretation of history is truer than an interpretation of history in terms of men's moral values, a man may merely be saying that one must specify the economic institutions under which men live much more often than the moral values they profess in order to explain their behavior. One is not necessarily saying that men's moral values never have anything to do with the way men behave.

(2) The second kind of interpretation of history, however, is a very different sort of thing; and it is due to its frequent association with interpretations of the first kind, probably, that there is so much suspicion of the first. This second kind of interpretation of history proposes an interpretation of *the historical process as a whole*, and usually tries to show that in history nothing is wasted and everything serves a single design. But a law directly predicting the overall direction in which a system as a whole must move can only apply to an isolated system, and it should be plain that historical sequences do not fall into this class. Brooks Adams to the contrary notwithstanding, the kind of system to which the second law of thermodynamics, for example, applies is not the kind of system with which one is dealing in history. More generally, interpretations of history of this second type must be able to show that all the events that have taken place or will take place in history—and, in the end, in the natural world as well—must comprise a single, integrated system each of whose parts is necessarily related to every other part. That ordinary empirical methods can yield no such conclusion is evident; and, in fact, this notion can only be maintained on the basis of some such questionable philosophic idea as the doctrine of internal relations.

Finally, such interpretations of history run afoul of the simple problem of justifying the values they present as the exclusive measure of human achievement. That men have measured their success and failure by a variety of standards is a plain fact of human history; and that they should all relinquish their different standards and accept a common one can be plain only to those who regard moral standards as commands imposed from outside the human scene, and as ultimately independent of what human beings actually are or want. There is not, to my knowledge, a single interpretation of history of this sort which does not turn history into the scene for the crucifixion of man in the name of some transcendent and occult purpose. This is true whether we think of Saint Augustine, Hegel, Mr. Toynbee, or Marxism in its more Stalinoid variations.

(3) It is when we come to the third kind of interpretation of history that the most interesting issues arise. Broadly, when an historian provides an "interpretation" of an age or a culture or an institution, he is doing something like the following. He is telling a story of a sequence of causally related events that have consequences of value or dis-value: in other words, he is showing that certain events are causally related to what I shall call "terminal consequences." To state the "meaning" of an historical process is to state these terminal consequences. And it is the question of the choice of terminal consequences that raises most of the issues concerning the possibility of objectivity in history. For it is plain that no historian, insofar as he wishes merely to delimit his problem, let alone pass judgment on the events he is recording, can avoid selecting certain terminal consequences as the frame of his story.

Now, in considering the problems raised by the historian's selection of terminal consequences, it is important to keep certain fairly obvious distinctions firmly in mind. To begin with, the question of whether a given sequence of events did or did not have certain results is an objective, factual question. Accordingly, while two historians may legitimately choose different terminal consequences in interpreting the same general period of history, this does not mean that any terminal consequences at all may be chosen. Further, two interpretations of a given period may in fact not be offering two accounts of the same facts, but accounts of different facts. The first begins with an event, *E*, and traces its consequences,  $C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots$  to terminal consequence  $T_1$ . The second begins with the same event *E*, but it traces *other* consequences,  $C_4, C_5, C_6, C_7, C_8 \dots$  to terminal consequence  $T_2$ . Thus, a sixteenth-century American Indian's interpretation of the meaning of Columbus's discovery of America would be different from a sixteenth-century Spaniard's and this difference reflects a real and tragic clash of interests. But both can be equally true and objective. Interpretations of history sometimes *seem* to clash because they are employed as instruments in a practical conflict of interests; but from the point of view of the facts they may not be in conflict at all, since they talk about different facts.

The failure to see this elementary point is the source of much of the wholesale skepticism that arises concerning the possibility of being objective in the writing of history. It is also responsible for many attempts to subject history to purely pragmatic standards. For although it is obvious that historians with different social habitats will view the stream of events from different perspectives, it does not follow that the past, or our beliefs about the past, must necessarily be recreated in each generation. Sometimes new evidence about what has happened turns up, or new and more reliable theories of human nature or social structure. When this happens, the historians of later ages really do rewrite the histories of their predecessors: they disagree about the facts. But when the historians of a later age write history in terms of terminal consequences that are different from those with which their predecessors were concerned, they are not rewriting history, they are writing another history. The old history can also be true, and true not only for the earlier age in which it was written but for the later age as well. The writing of history is the major

way in which the social memory of any fairly complicated group is refined and corrected, and it is of considerable significance to the life of such a group when its social memory is accurate and when it has certain stable features that persist through emergencies and shifting currents of opinion and sentiment. It is not only false to say that the histories written in each generation must necessarily disagree with those written in the past, or that histories written in any particular age can be true only for that age and not for any other; more than this, such statements lend sanction, wittingly or unwittingly, to a way of writing history that prevents history from achieving one of its most important social values.

### III

These considerations, however, merely bring us to the main issue. It may be granted that more than one interpretation of an historical period can be true and legitimate, provided they do not give incompatible accounts of exactly the same facts. But there nevertheless seems to be a difference of better and worse between interpretations that are offered. It is true to say, for example, that the "meaning" of modern science is an increase in creature comforts; it is also true to say that its "meaning" lies in the rise of a culture with new standards of intellectual and moral authority, and a new view of human excellence. Yet even though men might agree that two quite distinct, though intersecting, chains of events were being recounted in these two interpretations, the first seems somehow skimpier than the second, and inferior to it. What, then, are the considerations that enter into the choice of terminal consequences, and what are the standards, if any, by which we may make comparative judgments among such choices?

The selection of terminal consequences by the historian seems to be governed by four distinct, though not wholly separate, considerations. (1) The first, and most obvious, is the simple element of "interestingness." The historian obviously writes his story, and exhibits its meaning, in terms of terminal consequences in which he happens to be interested. Equally obviously, therefore, there is room for choice here. However, this does not necessarily imply that history must be "violently personal," or that historical events "can be correlated only within a framework of meaning to which the viewpoint of an age, a class, or a nation contributes as much as the facts themselves."<sup>9</sup> For in the first place, there is a clear difference between the historian whose interests are shifting or capricious, or who chooses terminal consequences that interest him or a small coterie alone, and the historian who makes his selection in terms of stable interests that are more widely shared. And since the writing of history is a public activity, and is normally the attempt to give an account of publicly significant events, it is natural to prefer the latter sort of historian to the former. Indeed, instead of having values that are evanescent, expressing some local prejudice or passing fashion, an historian may have values of a more durable sort which express the deeper, long-standing commitments of a larger

9. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, New York, 1949, pp. 117-18.

civilization. Such values, to be sure, are still the values of some particular place and time. But myopia in human affairs is measured in decades, not in millennia, and when the place whose values are expressed is an entire civilization and the span of time involved some twenty-five hundred or three thousand years, surely the charge of parochialism loses some of its sting.

Even more important, however, is the fact that an interpretation of history is not usually offered solely on the grounds that the values of which it turns happen to fall within the present interests of the historian or his audience. When a chain of events is said to have a "meaning" of a certain sort, something more is intended and something more is expected than only that the values involved are values that some men hold. The values involved, an interpretation of history seems to suggest, are values that men ought to hold, and which it is peculiarly right to employ as the measures of historical events. So while it is true that no interpretation of history can pass muster which does not turn on values that some men somewhere might in fact find interesting, other elements as well as the criterion of "interestingness" usually enter into interpretations of history.

(2) A second consideration which frequently enters into the choice of terminal consequences is a concern with those which have the greatest explanatory value—which are, that is to say, most pregnant in still further consequences. In selecting terminal consequences for this reason, the historian is tacitly treating these consequences as themselves causes of other events, as the beginnings of other histories; he is asserting that they are points of intersection from which the greatest number of lines radiate. Such an assertion plainly depends on general beliefs of a factual character about the weight of various sorts of causal factors in history. When governed by this consideration, therefore, an interpretation of history involves an ordinary form of causal assertion, and falls ultimately within the class of interpretations of history that are attempts to formulate theoretical frameworks for the explanation of the procession of human affairs.

(3) A third element that may enter into the selection of terminal consequences is related to the second, but is not identical with it. Certain consequences may be selected because they are held, tacitly or explicitly, to be the key variables in the formulation and implementation of an effective social policy—the variables that can and should be manipulated. Thus, the so-called "new historians" turned away from military and narrowly political history and made the rise of science their central concern; and they did so because they were convinced that science was the key social instrument that had to be understood and employed if modern societies were to solve their problems. Similarly, Marx made the emergence of an industrial proletariat the great event of the nineteenth century because he believed that only this class had the power and interest to do what needed to be done to organize an industrial society effectively. Of course, such interpretations of history are more or less disguised instances of advocating a cause, and are not only descriptions. Nevertheless, the worth of an interpretation of history, judged from this point of view, is not independent of factual considerations. It depends on the sound-



ness of the social program it implicitly offers, and is to be judged as we judge social programs—in terms of the generalizations and specific predictions they make, the feasibility of their proposals, and the objective consequences of following them. Choice and personal preference may of course enter; but it might be said that the function of such interpretations of history, and of the factual investigations into which they lead, is to make such choices more responsible by showing the limited number of alternatives that are possible and by clarifying their objective implications.

(4) This brings us to a fourth element that may enter into interpretations of history. It has to do not simply with the explanatory or practical value that selected terminal consequences may have, but with their importance, actual or potential, with respect to some scheme of human good. An interpretation of history, in short, may rest on an implicit theory of human progress. No such theory, of course, can be absolute or exclusive. Nevertheless, this does not seem to me to mean that objective and impersonal considerations do not also enter, and that they cannot logically govern our choice of one interpretation of an historical sequence over another. For a scheme of human good represents an attempt to find some equilibrium among a variety of not always compatible human drives and interests. Its worth depends on its relation to the facts, and on how much it can make out of the limited opportunities with which, at any moment in history, we are confronted. There is an important, and objectively identifiable, difference between an historian whose interpretation of history is governed by unrealistic or impossible standards and one whose standards are realistic and possible; there is an even more important difference between an historian whose image of human excellence is provincial and niggardly and one whose image is full and generous. The employment of such distinctions in our judgment of the work of historians is both relevant and inescapable. For we go to history not simply to find out what has happened in human affairs, but also what is possible. And not only is it difficult for an historian to mask his beliefs about what is possible and desirable, but that history which is lit by some clear and circumspect idea of what human life can be is generally preferred to the history that is impassive, that never commits itself, and that lacks a guiding ideal or the irony or tears that go with applying such an ideal to the record of human affairs.

#### IV

In view of these considerations, it does not seem to me that there is never an impersonal way of choosing between competing "schemes of meaning" in history. Despite the fact that interpretations of history frequently enter into the actual explanations that are offered by historians, the writing of history is not condemned to be a battleground for irreconcilable points of view. Nor do we have to remain content with an uncritical pluralism which simply asserts that history may be read from many points of view, and that each man may choose his own. It is certainly improbable that any single point of view can ever claim an exclusive sovereignty; but it is equally improbable that all points of view are equally legitimate, even when they are all in the hands of scrupulous historians who do not falsify the facts.

These considerations apply in particular to a final way in which the term "interpretation" is sometimes used in connection with history. It is sometimes said that statements about the "true" or "primary" cause of an historical event or sequence of events are all "matters of interpretation"—matters that depend, that is to say, simply on the level on which we choose to describe a sequence of events or the kind of interest we have in these events. According to this point of view, therefore, disagreements about the "true cause" of an historical sequence are actually not genuine disagreements at all (at any rate, when there is no disagreement about what specifically happened), but are only the expression of different, and equally legitimate, interests or perspectives. This view has been expressed by Mr. Gardiner with lucidity and force:

It is . . . a mistake [he writes] to imagine that the historian is contradicting the journalist when he says that the Sarajevo assassination was not the true cause of the outbreak of the First World War. He is merely regarding the outbreak of war from a different point of view, talking about it upon a different level. The question "why did the First World War occur?" is answerable in various ways: it is answerable upon the level of individual human purposes, desires, weaknesses, and abilities; it is answerable upon the level of national policies, traditions of diplomacy, plans; it is answerable upon the level of political alignments, treaties, the international structure of Europe in 1914; it is answerable upon the level of economic trends, social organization, political doctrine, ideology, and the rest.<sup>10</sup>

This position as it stands, it seems to me, is true only if so many qualifications are added that it no longer actually says what it seems to be saying. It is of course undeniable that a term like "World War I" covers such a vast congeries of events that two men who seem nominally to be talking about the War may in fact be talking about quite different sequences of events, or about sequences that intersect each other at only limited points. As I have tried to suggest above, historians may of course ask a number of different questions quite legitimately about a given "event," and from a number of different points of view. Arguments among historians about the "true cause" of a given event are frequently only pseudo-arguments and not the assertion of incompatible statements about the facts.

But this is not necessarily the case always. For there are a considerable number of cases where historians (or an historian and a journalist) seem to have exactly the same event, or the same aspects of an event, in mind, and where they still disagree about the "true cause" of the event. And at least some of these disputes appear to be disagreements about what was "primary" or "most important" in producing the event in question. Frequently such disputes arise, to be sure, because people have different notions of what is meant by "primary" or "most important," or only vague or ambiguous notions. However, the notion of "primary" or "most important" is capable of being given one or another specific and definite meaning in a given context,<sup>11</sup> such that disagreements about what in fact was primary or most important (or what was

10. Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, Oxford, 1952, p. 105.

11. Cf. Nagel, *op. cit.*

the "true cause") are in principle capable of being resolved by appeal to a common body of evidence. Frequently, of course, the evidence available is not enough to give a positive answer one way or the other. But this is because it is difficult to get at the facts, and not because the issue is not a factual one.

Most specifically, an historian may in fact sometimes be genuinely contradicting the journalist, and rightly, when he says that the Sarajevo assassination was not the "true cause" of the outbreak of the First World War. He may be saying, for example, that while World War I needed a trigger to set it going, other triggers were available and would probably have been pulled; and as a result the particular trigger that happened to set the conflagration going is largely "accidental." This does not make the journalist's account of what happened either false or unnecessary; but it calls very definitely into question the journalist's allegation (or, more probably, the reader's belief) that he has stated the "true cause" of what happened. Suppose, for example, there was a factory in which it was the careless practice to leave explosives here, there, and elsewhere; suppose, further, that it was the practice for visitors and workers in the factory to throw lighted matches around. When the factory blew up, would we be satisfied with nothing but an account of the event which merely stated that a certain match had been thrown by a certain person on a certain day, and left out the above facts? And would we regard this account as providing as good an explanation as one that included these facts?

Indeed, it is ordinarily not just a question of different perspectives, between which we may take our choice, when one historian asserts that World War I can be explained on the level of "individual human purposes, desires, weaknesses, and abilities," and a second asserts that it ought rather to be explained on the level of "economic trends, social organization, political doctrine, ideology, and the rest." An historian who prefers the second kind of explanation to the first may believe (whether rightly or wrongly is not the question) that the deliberate purposes, desires, etc. of individuals are not so important in determining what happens as are the unintended consequences that come about when individuals interact within definite institutional structures. He may, that is to say, hold an "institutional" interpretation of history rather than, say, a "biographical" interpretation. Thus, with respect to the outbreak of World War I, he may believe that the institutional structure prevailing in 1914 was such that it gave individuals in power no choice but war, and that even if other individuals had been in power, the result would have been the same; or he may believe that individuals with quite the same purposes, desires, weaknesses, and abilities as those who held power would have succeeded in avoiding war in 1914 if the institutional structure had been different. All this may or may not be easy to prove. But surely it is not just a different way of looking at things, another answer to what is really another question. It is another and competing answer to the same question as that which the man who explains the war on the level of "individual human purposes, desires, weaknesses, and abilities" is trying to answer.<sup>12</sup>

12. Of course, it is possible to write individual biography institutionally, and to

Different approaches to history thus seem to represent, at least some times, substantive disagreements about the actual ways in which events are connected with one another, disagreements that are of the highest significance and cannot be dissolved simply by regarding them as the expressions of different, and equally legitimate, perspectives. Sometimes two interpretations of history are in fact recounting different sequences of events; sometimes they are recounting the same sequence of events, and explaining them in the same way, but in two different languages; but sometimes they are disagreeing about what were the most important causes or the most important consequences of a given sequence of events—about what, in other words, should or should not be included in the historian's story to make that story an adequate answer to the question that has been raised. Arguments about the proper interpretation of an historical sequence, or about its "true" or "basic" causes, it would thus appear, are at least sometimes genuine and important arguments that are factual in character. And given a willingness to be clear and a good deal more information than we now normally possess, they are capable of being resolved.

## ALAN DONAGAN

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describe institutions in terms of the careers of individuals. Frequently the "difference" between one approach and the other may be only a difference between two mutually inter-translatable languages, both of which are saying the same thing. But if this is the case, then the accounts of events that are given by the two languages are not simply not in disagreement; they are not even really different, and cannot be described as being on different "levels" any more than two identical descriptions of a dog, one in English and one in German, can be described as being on different "levels." One language or the other may be more convenient for the job in question, but this is the only issue. At least sometimes, in other words, there seems to be no objective reason for choosing between "two" approaches to history only because, in fact, there is no real difference between them.

## Explanation in History\*

Few philosophers have accepted the opinion of the late R. G. Collingwood that "the chief business of twentieth-century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth-century history"; but it is hard for anybody with even a superficial interest in what historians write to reject Collingwood's reason: "about the end of the nineteenth century something of the same kind [as the seventeenth century revolution in natural science] was happening, more gradually and less spectacularly perhaps, but not less certainly, to history" (*An Autobiography*, Oxford edn. p. 79). But that it must be rejected, I shall argue, is a consequence of the theory of historical thinking which prevails among contemporary philosophers. This theory I shall call "Hempelian," after Professor Carl Hempel, in whose fine essay, "The Function of General Laws in History,"<sup>1</sup> its fundamentals were first comprehensively expounded. The name "Hempelian" is used *honoris causa*, not because the prevailing theory derives from Hempel,<sup>2</sup> but because his essay is its classical statement, to which any variant may be accommodated as a gloss.

It would not follow that the Hempelian theory is mistaken, even if it should turn out to conflict with historians' or common readers' estimates of recent historical work. No such estimate is immune from error: Berkeley's criticism of fluxions has worn better than the replies of contemporary mathematicians. Nevertheless, whenever the common opinion of those acquainted with a productive intellectual discipline conflicts with a philosophical theory, a sceptical re-examination of the theory is proper.

(1) *The Hempelian Theory*. The cardinal tenet of the Hempelian theory is that all scientific explanations have a common form. A scientific explanation must be such that what is explained may be logically deduced from it; a weaker connexion would invalidate it. There are two kinds of scientific explanation, differentiated by the kinds of thing they explain. The first of these is the explanation of individual happenings: a landslip, say, or a political murder, or a victory in battle. Explanations of this kind have two components: (1) statements of other prior or simultaneous happenings, and (2) general laws established by empirical evidence. General

\*Reprinted with the kind permission of the author and the editor of *Mind*, where this article first appeared in 1957.

1. *Jour. Phil.* vol. xxxix (1942), reprinted in Feigl and Sellars, *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949) and in the present volume. Hereafter this essay is referred to as 'GLH', page references being to this volume.

2. Most of the essentials of the Hempelian theory were developed as early as 1931 in the late Morris R. Cohen's admirable *Reason and Nature*, Book I, ch. 1, sect. 2, and Book III, ch. 1, sects. 1 (d), 2, and 3. A good select bibliography of periodical contributions may be found in Feigl and Brodbeck, *Readings in the Philosophy of Science* (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), pp. 797-798. This volume is hereafter referred to as 'FB'.

laws admit no exceptions. In few explanations of individual happenings are all the relevant prior or simultaneous happenings stated: it is assumed that the happening to be explained occurs within a set of conditions, and that only significant prior or simultaneous changes in those conditions need be mentioned. (Cf. Mr. Kneale's *Probability and Induction*, pp. 61-62; the essential points had already been explained by Collingwood in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 296-312, where J. S. Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book III, ch. 5, sect. 3, is acknowledged). The second kind of explanation is of general laws. Explanations of this kind consist solely of general laws other than those which are explained. In both kinds of explanation, and especially in the second, the logical derivation of what is explained from its explanation may require dexterity and even deep insight.

While the Hempelian theory asserts that every scientific explanation is of one of these two kinds, it distinguishes between theoretical and historical sciences. Professor Nagel has drawn the distinction with exceptional clarity. "A theoretical science like physics seeks to establish both general and singular statements, and in the process of doing so physicists will employ previously established statements of both types. Historians, on the other hand, aim to assert warranted singular statements about the occurrence and interrelations of specific actions; and though this task can be achieved only by assuming and using general laws, historians do not regard it as part of their task to *establish* such laws. The distinction between history and theoretical science is thus somewhat analogous to the difference between medical diagnosis and physiology, or between geology and physics. A geologist seeks to ascertain, for example, the sequential order of geologic formations, and he is able to do so by applying various physical laws to the materials he encounters; it is not the geologist's task, *qua* geologist, to establish the laws of mechanics or of radioactive disintegration that he may employ"<sup>3</sup> (FB, p. 689). There is no difference in form between historical and geological explanations, so that human history is a branch of natural history. Explanations in human history, as in other branches of natural history, exemplify the first of the two Hempelian kinds; further explanation of the laws they employ is left to the theoretical sciences, which employ explanations of both kinds. Which theoretical sciences explain the laws historians employ? Hempel himself has observed that "those universal hypotheses to which historians explicitly or tacitly refer in offering explanations . . . are taken from *various* fields of scientific research, in so far as they are not pre-scientific generalizations of everyday experiences" (GLH, p. 470); but he would not, I think, dissent from the received opinion that the fledgling social sciences already provide many of them, and will, as they develop, supply historians with well-confirmed laws to replace the pre-scientific generalizations on which they must now too often rely.

So far, we have simply rehearsed a theory. What reasons can be offered to prove it? Its advocates do not offer much by way of argument, preferring

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3. "The Logic of Historical Analysis," *The Scientific Monthly*, vol. lxxiv (1952); reprinted in the present volume, p. 375, above.

to elicit it by a sort of intuitive induction from specimens in natural science and natural history. Possibly they think that, once expounded, its truth is obvious; and, certainly, two lines of proof come readily to mind. They are as follows: (1) If it is supposed that an explanation need not logically entail what it explains, but may be consistent with several other possibilities, then it will fail to explain why one or other of those possibilities was not realized, i.e. it will fail to explain why what it purports to explain should have happened rather than something else. Now, it may be contended, no statement that a certain individual happening took place can be logically derived from other statements about individual happenings except by way of general laws. (2) As Hempel urges against a view of Mr. Mandelbaum, "Every 'causal explanation' is an 'explanation by scientific laws'; for in no way other than by reference to empirical laws can the assertion of a causal connection between certain events be scientifically substantiated" (GLH, p. 461). In other words, unless historical explanations satisfy the Hempelian theory, they cannot be verified, and should be condemned as subjective.

That both these lines of proof are *a priori* is not to their discredit. But are they valid? Although no fact can overthrow a valid *a priori* argument, in trying to decide whether or not a given *a priori* argument is valid, it is permissible to take facts into consideration. The facts I consider concern what historians actually recognize as explanations. Those who have adopted the Hempelian theory have not ignored historical explanations, but they have placed little weight on the claims historians make for them.

Let us begin with an example invented by Hempel (GLH, p. 464): "the Dust Bowl farmers migrate to California 'because continual drought and sandstorms render their existence increasingly precarious, and because California seems to them to offer so much better living conditions.'" On the face of it, this explains a migration of Dust-Bowl farmers to California by two statements of individual happenings: (1) that drought and sandstorms rendered their existence increasingly precarious; and (2) that they believed California to offer them better living conditions. The statement of the fact to be explained, however, certainly does not logically follow from these two statements; so that, according to the Hempelian theory, this explanation must, if sound, be elliptical; for what is to be explained must logically follow from its explanation, and statements about individual happenings can be interconnected only by assuming and using general laws (*cf.* Nagel, *loc. cit.*, FB, p. 689). "Such terms as 'hence,' 'therefore,' 'consequently,' 'because,' 'naturally,' 'obviously,' etc., are often indicative of the tacit presupposition of some general law: they are used to tie up the initial conditions with the event to be explained; but that the latter was 'naturally' to be expected as 'a consequence' of the stated conditions follows only if suitable general laws are presupposed" (GLH, p. 464). "Resuscitation of the assumptions buried under the gravestones 'hence,' 'therefore,' 'because,' and the like" (GLH, p. 466) is an exercise familiar to those drilled in syllogistic logic; by its means Hempel is able to resuscitate from his example the assumption of "some such universal hypothesis as that populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer

better living conditions" (GLH, p. 464). The resuscitation of this buried assumption unfortunately exposes a friendless corpse: "it would obviously be difficult accurately to state this hypothesis in the form of a general law which is reasonably well confirmed by all the relevant evidence available" (GLH, p. 464). Such difficulties, it is acknowledged, arise often.

In the light of these facts, only two verdicts on historical explanation are consistent with the Hempelian theory. One, which few swallow, is that most historical explanations are simply false. The other, preferred by Hempel himself, is that they are imperfect: they are not intended as explanations proper but as "explanation sketches"; "such a sketch consists of a more or less vague indication of the laws and initial conditions considered as relevant, and it needs 'filling-out' in order to turn into a full-fledged explanation. This filling-out requires further empirical research, for which the sketch suggests the direction" (GLH, p. 465). Since "concrete research may tend to confirm or infirm these indications," explanation sketches "have some empirical import" and are consequently testable (GLH, p. 466). In Hempel's example, the sketch would presumably be filled out by finding a less vulnerable universal hypothesis than that populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions, and a more precise definition of the relevant initial conditions; if the sketch were to be confirmed both the fuller-fledged hypothesis and the more precisely defined initial conditions would have to do with attempts to better living conditions. It is for the social sciences to establish such hypotheses. The difficulties confronting this program are formidable and, since they are not unknown, need not be dwelt on. One which is crucial is that, since in social science "single factors cannot be easily isolated and independently measured," there cannot be any "composition of forces," so that a complex system of laws is out of the question. If laws in social science assert only tendencies, then their operation is indeterminate: "conflicting schools or parties can begin with the assertion of opposite tendencies and never really join in a definite issue." (Cf. Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature*, Book III, ch. 1, sect. 3(d), reprinted FB, pp. 672-673.) Mr. Patrick Gardiner has proposed a further refinement, partly designed to obviate difficulties of this kind. Such hypotheses as that populations tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions are open or porous in texture: thus, Hempel's example does not determine how much better the living conditions must be, or which living conditions are significant; "any attempt to demarcate precisely the area of its application" is precluded (*The Nature of Historical Explanation*, pp. 93-94). So much might appear to be implicit in Hempel's exposition, but Gardiner goes further. "The historian, like the general or the statesman, tends to assess rather than to conclude.... There is, indeed, a point in terming (for example) the explanations provided by the historian 'judgments'.... These assessments or judgments, however, are not 'made, or accepted, in default of anything 'better': we should rather insist that their formulation represents the end of historical inquiry, not that they are stages on the journey towards that end" (*ibid.* pp. 95-96). Gardiner cannot have it both ways: if he denies that an historical explanation sketch merely shows the



way to something better, he must renounce Hempel's method of confirmation, which is to discover something better in the direction towards which it points. If he knows of any other method of confirmation, Gardiner does not vouchsafe it;<sup>4</sup> the only one he mentions, that of practical success, which may be employed in judging the assessments of generals or statesmen, plainly does not apply to those of historians. So, despite his disclaimer (*ibid.* p. 95), if historical explanations are merely assessments or judgments, then they are "subjective" in a vicious sense."

Those advocates of the Hempelian theory who are not eager to deny history all scientific value, are fast in a dilemma: either historical explanations presuppose false universal hypotheses, or they are mere sketches which it is extremely difficult to supersede with anything better, or which have degenerated into subjective assessments. The best face Nagel can put upon the situation is to claim that, "although there are often legitimate grounds for doubt concerning the validity of specific causal imputations in history, there appears to be no reason for converting such doubt into wholesale skepticism"\* (*FB*, p. 700). There is, besides, an excuse: "the probable cost of remedial measures in terms of labor and money seems staggering" (*ibid.*).

Do historians accept either this depreciation or this cold comfort? How do they view their own efforts at explanation?

There can be no general answers to these questions. Many historical explanations are bad, since bad historians we have always with us. And philosophers are sometimes obtuse in selecting or fabricating examples. Thus Gardiner devotes two pages of his book (pp. 96-97) to describing what an historian would do if faced with the question: "Why did Louis XIV die unpopular?" An historian could not be faced with this question unless he could prove the fact; and it is hard to see how he could prove *this* fact unless he also knew its explanation (cf. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 214). By contrast, Hempel's factitious example is a happy one; and many good historical explanations resemble it. Thus Mr. J. A. Williamson, in his excellent short history, *The Evolution of England*, explains the Scandinavian invasion of Britain in the first half of the ninth century thus: "The Norsemen and Danes who sailed south to the Irish Sea and to the shores of the English Channel were plunderers first and settlers by an afterthought. Like the early Anglo-Saxons, they came to sack a civilized land, and only when they had stolen all they could get did they think of occupying its soil" (pp. 47-48). If any buried assumption is to be resuscitated from this, it would be, I suppose, that all men, or all Norsemen and Danes, and perhaps Anglo-Saxons too, are plunderers first and settlers by afterthought. Plausible this assumption may be, but it would be fantastic

4. In the pages which follow (pp. 96-99), Gardiner appears to suggest that historians "fill in," and so justify or support their explanations, by elaborating detail. It is hard to see how providing details of the hard lot of Dust-Bowl farmers, and of their dreams of Californian opulence, could scientifically support Hempel's explanation of their migration, though it might persuade by inducing an historically vicious use of "empathy."

\* See this volume, p. 385.

5. Cf. F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (vol. II of the *Oxford History of England*), 2nd edn., pp. 240-244.

to suppose that Williamson would consider his explanation weakened if exceptions could be found to it. Mr. J. N. L. Myres' explanation of the Saxon invasions in the fifth and sixth centuries (vol. i. of the *Oxford History of England*, pp. 339-351), though too long to quote, also resembles Hempel's example. Now, it is plain that both Williamson and Myres consider their explanations true, and both cite evidence which is convincing to an amateur. It is equally clear that they do not think them imperfect, or mere sketches. They are not final, because further questions must be asked. But to the question, Why did those groups of Norsemen and Danes sail south? Williamson professes to have given an historically perfect, though corrigible, answer. Myres implicitly makes a similar claim.

The Hempelian theory, therefore, contradicts at least some good historians' opinions about their explanations. Before considering the implications of this conflict, we must consider a way of amending the theory to bring it into accord with these opinions. If historical explanations should rest, not on laws, but on approximations to them—on generalizations that are mostly true—then, it has been argued, they would not be refutable by inconvenient exceptions. This amendment must be distinguished from Gardiner's interpretation, which is that some historical explanations rest on laws which are genuinely universal, but of which the area of application is open and indeterminate. One objection seems to be decisive: an explanation which rests on an approximate generalization cannot entail what it explains, and so must fall short of the *a priori* condition that it may allow no alternative to what it explains.

(2) *Non-Hempelien Historical Explanations*. That historical explanations of the kind exemplified in the specimens we have given belong to a large class of non-Hempelien explanations has been recognized by Gardiner in Part IV of *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, and by Mr. J. W. N. Watkins in his essay, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation" (*British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. III, 1952, reprinted in FB). Both Gardiner and Watkins have derived from the work of Professor Ryle an analysis which, in the main, mine will follow. My justification for traversing once more this well-surveyed territory is to show how different it looks if one goes in a sceptical spirit, without the preconception that every happening must have an Hempelian explanation.

The Hempelian theory, I have argued, may be defended upon two grounds: that Hempelian explanations alone logically entail what they explain, and that they alone are verifiable by producible evidence. If there are non-Hempelien explanations, it is imperative to answer three questions. Are they intended to satisfy the conditions on which the Hempelian theory rests, and if so, at what point are the arguments for the Hempelian theory defective? Are the conditions they are intended to satisfy scientifically defensible? Are they ever satisfied?

There is no doubt that our specimens are intended to be verifiable by producible evidence; that at least is shown in Collingwood's discussion of historical evidence (*The Idea of History*, part v, sect. 3, esp. pp. 256-261). What of the first condition, that an explanation must logically entail what

it explains? With some diffidence, I have concluded that, despite apparent exceptions, historical explanations are intended to satisfy this condition also.<sup>6</sup>

Some explanations are incomplete: they do not entail what they explain unless something is added to them. Hempel's factitious example is incomplete in this sense. To complete it, it would be necessary to show that the Dust-Bowl migrants thought that California alone offered them better prospects, or that the prospects there were significantly better than elsewhere. Similarly, Williamson's explanation, as it stands, incompletely explains why the Danes sailed into the English Channel and Irish Sea rather than, say, to the Mediterranean; on the other hand, as an explanation of the character of the invasion, *e.g.* of the fact that the invaders did not at first occupy the land, it is complete though not final. A final explanation is one which leaves room for no further demand for explanation: it is self-explanatory within the presuppositions of the inquiry within which it is given. Such explanations are usually sought only in the exact sciences, *e.g.* mathematics. An explanation may be complete, in the sense of requiring no addition in order to entail what it explains, and yet not be final: thus an Hempelian explanation of a planet's position at a certain time by deriving it, according to Kepler's laws, from information about its positions with respect to the sun at several prior times, would be complete, but not final; for explanations could be sought both of its prior positions and of Kepler's laws.

It is often superfluous to complete historical explanations, because the completion would be obvious, or easily ascertained, or boring. Besides, there are numerous explanations which it is impossible to complete for lack of evidence: these are defective, and admitted to be so by historians. Neither of these kinds of incompleteness poses any theoretical problem. There are, however, explanations which do not entail what they are said to explain, but which it appears to be in principle impossible to complete. If this appearance is not dissipated by analysis, then an exception must be admitted to our account of the conditions historical explanations are intended to satisfy. If a literary historian should explain Dr. Johnson's famous letter to Lord Chesterfield as a deliberate expression of his just indignation, it would be natural to concede that this is an explanation, whether true or not, but an incomplete one. Dr. Johnson might have expressed his indignation in other ways: by a satirical essay rather than a letter; in verse rather than in prose; or, at least, in words other than those used in his letter. Clearly then, the explanation does not entail that Dr. Johnson wrote the letter he did write and not something else. Yet could this explanation, even in principle, be completed? Certainly Dr. Johnson may have had reasons

6. Mr. Dray has distinguished between explanations of why a thing happened and explanations of how it could have happened (*Phil. Quart.* iv (1954), 19-20), and has shown that sometimes historians seek not the former but the latter (*ibid.* pp. 24-27). Although the Hempelian theory must be extended to allow for the latter, Dray would perhaps agree that most historical explanations, and the most important of them, explain why things happened; the Hempelian theory of these is undamaged by his results.

for writing a letter and not an essay, in prose and not in verse, and for choosing certain epithets and not others: given evidence, literary historians can pursue such questions surprisingly far. But no reader in his right mind would demand an explanation why the whole letter was written just as it was; nor would any competent historian seek to furnish it. I venture the following solution. The explanation given of Dr. Johnson's letter does not incompletely explain why it was written just as it was, but completely explains why it has certain general features. I think this becomes clear if we consider what would contradict it: it would be other apparently incomplete explanations, such as that he bore a grudge, was advertising himself, or was vindicating his wounded pride. From each of these, as from the explanation they contradict, it is possible to deduce that Dr. Johnson's letter has certain general features. The question of which explanation is right may be settled by considering whether the letter has the general features required by one rather than those required by the others.

If historical explanations, in as much as they are complete, are intended to satisfy both the *a priori* conditions on which the Hempelian theory rests, must they not satisfy the Hempelian theory? Not unless that theory in fact rests on its foundations, and it does so only if it is true that a statement about one individual happening cannot be logically derived from statements about other individual happenings except by the mediation of general laws. The clearest and most important of recent demonstrations that this crucial proposition is false has been provided by Ryle. Although the significance of Ryle's work for the philosophy of history has been recognized, notably by Gardiner and by J. W. N. Watkins, not all its implications have been understood. I dare not hope that what follows may exhaust them.

The cardinal point of Ryle's analysis is that ordinary physical explanations are often not Hempelian (*The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949),<sup>7</sup> pp. 88-89, 123-125). A man may explain the breaking of his windows by mentioning a cause, "They were stoned"; or he may explain why his windows broke when stoned by asserting that they were brittle (CM, p. 88). The first explanation corresponds to part of an Hempelian explanation—the statement of significant prior or simultaneous happenings. The second explanation differs from anything recognized in the Hempelian theory, which presupposes that the only way of deriving the statement that certain windows broke from the statement that they were stoned is by the allegedly buried general law, "All windows break when stoned." A general law is a hypothetical proposition which is general in that it mentions no individual. Taking "F" and "G" as predicate variables, a general law might have the form, "If anything is F it is G," though most laws are more complex in form than that. If we use the word "open" as a technical term meaning "containing no mention of individual things, happenings and so on," and "closed" as meaning "containing some mention of individuals," the laws are completely open (CM, p. 123). What of the statement, "Those windows were brittle"? There is no doubt that to make that statement is to assert a general hypo-

7. Hereafter referred to as CM, followed by a page number where necessary.

thetical proposition about those windows, which is, roughly, that if sharply struck or twisted they would not dissolve or stretch or evaporate but fly into fragments (CM, p. 89). In some respects this hypothetical is open: it does not mention any individual thing that may strike them or any individual occurrence in which they were struck, or in which they flew into fragments. But in one respect it is closed: it mentions certain individual windows. Its form is not "if anything is F it is G," but "if these individuals should be F they would be G." There are degrees of openness and closedness. Instead of saying "Those windows are brittle," you might say "Those windows would fly into fragments if hit by this stone thrown with the force of a ten-year-old," or even "Those windows would break if Puck were to touch them with Oberon's sceptre at midnight next All Hallows' Eve"; the second of these is less open than the first, and the third than the second. To hypotheticals which are partly closed Ryle has given the name "law-like statements": they resemble general laws in being general hypotheticals; they differ in not being completely open (CM, pp. 123-124).

Whether or not this purely abstract analysis is relevant to history depends on Ryle's substantive doctrines of mind. Historians often explain the actions of men by referring to their plans, schemes, and intentions; and these they often explain by referring to the ends it is thought their execution will achieve, to the means thought permissible or not in achieving them, or to the enjoyment found in carrying out one rather than another. The adoption of ends is sometimes itself explicable by referring to reasons thought sufficient, and to scientific, ethical or religious principles. Within limits, some things a man does, or even believes, may be explained by referring to his character. These limits, however, are important: just as you cannot determine the degree to which a manuscript of an ancient Greek poet has been depraved except by deciding whether its individual lections are good or bad, so you cannot ascertain a man's character, itself a thing which changes, except by considering his capacities, the uses to which he puts them, the ends he pursues, and the means he thinks permissible to attain them. Now Ryle has contended that explanations of all these kinds resemble the explanation that certain windows broke when they were stoned because they were brittle: in giving them historians are asserting law-like propositions about the publicly observable, and, to a lesser degree, the private and unobservable states and activities of the pertinent historical agents.

To revert to our earlier example, Williamson's statement that the Danes who invaded England in the early ninth century were plunderers first and settlers by afterthought. This is a statement about the ends adopted by those Danes, and Williamson uses it in several explanations. Although its texture is highly "porous" (to use Dr. Waismann's valuable expression), it immediately implies the law-like statement that if those Danes had opportunities of sufficient plunder in a territory, they would not settle in it; and, with other statements, it implies a host of further law-like statements, such as that if they produced or transmitted a literature it would glorify war rather than farming, and that if they had a religion it would permit them

to live as warriors. These and similar statements unfold the meaning of "They were plunderers first," and their law-like character makes it possible to derive, e.g. the fact that the Danes did not settle for a generation, from the fact that, during that period, Anglo-Saxon England provided opportunities for sufficient plunder.

Even among those who understand them, the principal theses of *The Concept of Mind* have not been universally accepted. I have no scope for a formal defense, and indeed, do not think them equally defensible. Those relevant to history concern the various things which Collingwood has classed together under his compendious notion of "thought," which appears to include everything mental except the flow of immediate consciousness, and which Ryle discusses under the traditional distinctions of thought, will, and certain types of emotion. The general view Ryle takes of these matters is independent of his conclusions about some feelings, images, and some sensations and sense-perceptions—indeed of the greater part of his theories of perception and imagination; and the arguments in its favour appear to me overwhelming. The view to which it is opposed is that Williamson's statement about the ends the Danish invaders had in view asserts that they performed, continuously or intermittently through the relevant period, private introspectible mental acts of a certain kind; and that performing acts of that kind is what is meant by "having an end in view." Except for negative arguments against alternatives, the only evidence I know for this position is that often a man knows without reflection what ends he has in view. This, however, does not entail that having an end is performing an introspectible mental act, unless either the conclusion is made trivial, e.g. by making having an end a paradigm of a mental act, or the premise is conjoined with another and false one, that all a man can know of his mind without reflection is that he is performing a private introspectible act or experiencing a private introspectible state. Furthermore, the supposititious acts and states appear to have no function in ordinary or scientific thinking about human action. "Here I should like to say: a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism" (Wittgenstein, *Phil. Inv.*, § 271). Ryle's adversaries themselves concede that a statement which, on their view, asserts that an introspectible mental act has occurred, will entail the law-like propositions in which Ryle would find most of their meaning; but familiar anti-reductionist arguments seem not to apply. If an historian knows to be true the pertinent law-like propositions about the conduct of the Danes, does he need also to know about their introspectible acts and states in order to pronounce on their ends and intentions? Could any information about these introspectible acts and states affect his verdict? (Cf. CM, pp. 65-69). "... Theories which made no mention of the deliverances of 'inner perception' were at first likened to 'Hamlet' without the Prince of Denmark. But the extruded hero soon came to seem so bloodless and spineless a being that even opponents of these theories began to feel shy of imposing heavy theoretical burdens on his spectral shoulders" (CM, p. 328).

We are now in a position to answer the first of the three questions with

which this part of our inquiry began. Historical explanations of the kind exemplified by our specimens are intended to satisfy the conditions on which the Hempelian theory is founded: they must both admit of scientific substantiation, and logically entail what they explain. However, and here the Hempelian theory is defective, they may fulfil these conditions without presupposing any general laws. Our specimens presuppose only law-like statements, which, as Ryle has shown, suffice to connect one happening with another.

To the second question, "Are these conditions scientifically defensible?" a ready answer would be that they must be, provided only that Ryle's analyses hold, and that the fundamental Hempelian conditions themselves be defensible. There is, however, one objection which must be answered. "The suggestion has been made that [law-like]<sup>8</sup> statements while not themselves laws, are deductions from laws, so that we have to learn some perhaps crude and vague laws before we can assert them" (CM, p. 124). That is to say, law-like statements directly presuppose laws. If that were so, the criticism of the Hempelian theory which I have so painfully elaborated would be idle. Although this objection is widely received, I know of no reason why it should be; and Ryle's brief confutation seems to be final. "In general, the learning process goes the other way. We learn to make a number of [law-like] statements about individuals before we learn laws stating general correlations between such statements" (CM, p. 124). A man may know that his windows are brittle, but not know the laws from which, together with information about their composition and size, his law-like knowledge may be deduced. A more ultimate objection may now be met: even if law-like statements do not presuppose laws from which, together with other information, they could be deduced, nevertheless it may be in principle true that there must be such laws, even though they be unknown. That this is so is the doctrine of determinism, to which we shall return. At present it suffices that the question whether our specimens are legitimate explanations is unaffected by whether or not the law-like statements they employ may be derived from laws as yet unknown. Without presupposing general laws, they entail what they explain, and may be known to be true: so that the conditions they satisfy, while differing in one respect from those required by the Hempelian theory, are yet scientifically irreproachable.

Finally, Do any historical explanations satisfy these conditions? The greater part of the preceding investigation has been devoted to the logical relations between explanations and what they explain, since we received as conclusive Collingwood's demonstration that historical explanations are put forward as capable of scientific substantiation. Well, how can they be scientifically substantiated? Historians' procedure is similar to that employed for explanations involving laws: they deduce from the explanation alone, or from it together with other propositions, that certain evidence should be found; if they do not find it, they reject or revise either the explanation or some of the other propositions; if they do, they accept the explanation unless

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8. I have substituted "law-like" for "dispositional" here and in the sequel.

some alternative also explains the evidence; if there are alternatives, they decide between them by the same procedure. Consider again Williamson's explanation of the course of the Danish invasion. One may deduce from it that Saxon records will show that the communities defeated by the Danes in battle were plundered and abandoned, and that the resources of the Saxon communities were exhausted by these raids before their occupation by the Danes; unfortunately little archaeological evidence is available (F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 696). If reliable evidence of this kind is found (and in order to use an historical record, one must be able to demonstrate in what respects it is reliable), unless another explanation is consistent with it, Williamson would be entitled to claim that his explanation is proved.

Since a thorough investigation of the process of historical reconstruction, or hypothesis, and proof may be found in the second and third Epilegomena to Collingwood's *The Idea of History*, I shall dwell only on the most striking difference between the proof of an historical explanation of the kind to which our specimens belong, and that of an Hempelian explanation. It is this. The general laws on which Hempelian explanations turn, being open, apply to all times and places, so that it is usually possible to test them either by contriving artificial experiments, or, as in astronomy, by observing recurrences in the present. By contrast, the law-like propositions on which our historical explanations turn, being partly closed, apply only to mentioned individuals, so that the only evidence for or against them is in what survives of the traces, effects, and influence of those individuals' actions: to test them either by experiment or by observing recurrences, is not something lamentably difficult; it is strictly inconceivable. This fact has advantages and disadvantages. The quantity of evidence relevant to many historical law-like propositions is so exiguous that they cannot be scientifically established or refuted: here natural history, the explanations of which are Hempelian, has an unquestionable advantage. On the other hand, as Collingwood pointed out, it follows that our historical explanations are not "permissive"; that is, they are not affected by finding exceptions to any hypothesized general law (*The Idea of History*, p. 261).

(3) *Concluding Remarks.* Since it is impossible to anticipate the innumerable objections which might be advanced against the conclusions I have reached, I have chosen at random a few questions for discussion, each in itself important. (i) Do our conclusions apply to all or most historical explanations, or to a few only? (ii) Since historians evidently do employ generalizations, how do they if not in explanations? (iii) Since it is said to be philosophically demonstrable that every happening is explicable in principle according to general laws, are not historical explanations acceptable only *faute de mieux*, to be replaced if possible by others of the same type as those of natural history?

(i) Since, of necessity, I have worked from selected examples, it should be superfluous to disclaim comprehensiveness. My selection, however, was not capricious: neither economic, nor geographical, nor possible sociological explanations were overlooked. It is a fundamental error to conceive such



explanations as of types different from those we have examined. Both Hempel's explanation of the migration from the Dust Bowl and Williamson's of the Danish invasion of England are, after all, economic; and I have borne in mind throughout two other specimens which I have recently had occasion to study, Charles A. Beard's celebrated *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913), and Professor Bielenstein's explanation of the fall of the Emperor Wang Mang and the restoration of the Han dynasty by "a change in the course of the Yellow River, a natural disaster which could not have been prevented and therefore was no one's fault," but "whose consequences affected half of the population" (*The Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Bulletin No. 26 [Stockholm, 1954], p. 154). In these works, as in all genuine historiography, economic or geographical factors are exhibited as operating by way of the distinctive responses<sup>9</sup> different historical agents make to them; and those responses are unintelligible except in terms of the knowledge, efficiency, character and way of life of whoever makes them. If sociology should develop as economics has, the same point will hold of sociological explanations. An historian, who has reason to presume that his readers are familiar with the kind of response his characters would make to certain situations, may properly mention only the relevant situation in explaining their conduct: should he do so, it would be a howler to overlook what he has presumed, and profess to resuscitate from his explanation some preposterous universal hypothesis.

When, in the concluding chapter of his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Lord Keynes referred to "the economic causes of war, namely, the pressure of population and the competitive struggle for markets" (p. 381), he implied no such absurdity as that competition between Norway and Switzerland in the search for markets is a cause of war; and in mentioning pressure of population he had in mind, not nineteenth century Ireland or early twentieth century India, but, primarily, Mussolini's Italy and modern Japan. He presupposed no universal hypothesis of any kind.

A more recent socio-economic example is found in a correspondence in *History Today*, v (1955), pp. 554-555. To Mr. H. R. Trevor-Roper's explanation of the later phase of the Great Rebellion—the so-called "Independent" revolution—as a revolution of the lesser and declining gentry aimed at anti-capitalist decentralization, a correspondent objected, "It is surely curious that a revolt of the poverty-stricken gentry against Court and City should receive least support from those areas that were furthest away from both and most poverty-stricken." So it would be if Trevor-Roper's explanation had been Hempelian. That it was not is unmistakable from his reply.

9. The word "response" is stolen from Professor A. J. Toynbee's *A Study of History* (London, 1934), vols. i-ii, though I cannot accept Toynbee's presupposition, that if the genesis of civilizations are not the result of biological factors or of geographical environment acting separately, they must be the result of some kind of interaction between them. Professor Geyl's judgment is sound, that although "the striking formula of challenge and response" is "a find," it is a mistake to follow Toynbee in formulating laws in terms of it. "There is no question here of a law. . . ." Cf. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, ix (1948), 99.

"... We must remember that not all members of the same social class respond to the same pressures by the same social attitude. Some members of a depressed class may rebel, others submit and become defeatist; the difference is in their personal character and their political organization." Provided that the rebellious Independents were of the class to which Trevor-Roper assigns them, and acted from the motives he reconstructs, his explanation will stand whatever may be true of the loyal lesser gentry. In some cases at least nothing comes of pushing the matter any further. Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King; his neighbour, Kentish Sir John, became an Independent rebel; the difference was in "their personal character."

It may be objected that this does not meet the point of most importance. To cite another example from Williamson: "The transmission of the precious metals in bulk from across the ocean began with the capture of Mexican gold by Cortes in 1519, continued with the looting of Peru by Pizarro in 1532, and settled down into a regular stream with the working of the silver mines in both regions a few years later. This influx of gold and silver spread all over Europe and caused money to grow less valuable, or, in other words, prices to rise" (*The Evolution of England*, p. 213). This explanation presupposes both that in the early sixteenth century an economic system obtained in Europe, from the laws of which it could be deduced that if there should be a great influx of gold and silver, unaccompanied by any compensating occurrence, prices would rise, and that at that time there was no compensating occurrence. In short, it really is Hempelian. It explains, however, the conditions of historical action, *i.e.* a rise in prices, not action itself, *i.e.* what response was made to that rise. To this it might be objected that a rise in prices is a matter of many acts by many persons: that is true, but beside the point; for the explanation presupposes that a certain economic system obtained, *i.e.* that the persons concerned would, in certain circumstances, act in certain ways. How is that explained? If it is only explicable in the way I have described, as a response proceeding from the knowledge and character of the agents concerned, then the Hempelian explanation rests on a non-Hempelian one.

There are, however, economic determinists, who maintain both that a thorough understanding of any economic system will include knowledge of the laws according to which any instance of that system must develop into an instance of a different system, and that the economic system of a society determines the general character of its political, religious and artistic life. These are, roughly, doctrines of Marx and Engels: if they were true, our analysis would not best hold of history as it is, not of history as it should be. I think both doctrines to be false, though I cannot here attempt to refute them. I refer, however, to a line of investigation pursued by Mr. Leonard Krieger in his essay, "Marx and Engels as Historians" (*Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. xiv, 1953). Krieger shows that Marx and Engels found the concepts of class their earlier historical work seemed to require, especially that for *Class Struggles in France*, to diverge from those of their political and economic theories; and argues that this led them to distinguish class as an economic phenomenon from class as something of

which its members are conscious, and to explain the latter by a theory of false consciousness. They concluded that history, as written, is the history of false consciousness, and that the true key to understanding historical events is not history, but "dialectic." There is undoubtedly some truth in the theory of false consciousness; but historians, while finding that a certain group had a false view of its situation, would nevertheless correctly explain the actions of its members in terms of it. The main contribution of Marx to history was his enlargement of other historians' insight, not his circumvention of history by dialectic.

(ii) Do historians employ generalizations, and, if so, how? We have already remarked that historians sometimes explain conditions of historical action in the Hempelian way; where, as in Williamson's explanation of price inflation in the sixteenth century, such explanations themselves involve action, we have suggested that they derive from non-Hempelian explanations. Historians therefore employ universal hypotheses at least to the extent required by these explanations, and universal hypotheses are often thought of (misleadingly) as generalizations. More importantly, historians employ generalizations to guide their investigations. Professor R. M. Crawford, illustrating another point, furnishes this excellent example. "From a rough, unsystematic, unformulated generalization of experience, we predict what we would expect to find in the matter to be explained. For example, in preparing a lecture on the Port Phillip Separation Movement, I felt that to account for six years of organized and sustained agitation, I should expect to find that those who organized and shared in that agitation were injured by their connexion with New South Wales in some important and probably material fashion. And of course I soon found that they were..." (*Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, iii [1944-49] p. 165). The utility of the generalization, "Those who organize and share in a sustained agitation against a political arrangement must be injured by that arrangement in some important and probably material fashion," does not depend on its universal truth. Its function is to direct historians to look for something, not to assure them of finding it. To find that, in an individual case, say, the agitation against partition in Ireland, or that for Enosis in Cyprus, the generalization does not hold, would entail neither that the case was inexplicable nor that the generalization should be revised. None of this contradicts our thesis, which is not that historians do not use generalizations, nor even that they do not use them in any of their explanations, but that they do not use them in explaining historical actions.

(iii) Ought historical explanations to be displaced as soon as possible by others of the same type as those of natural history? This question may arise from more than one set of presuppositions. One such set is sometimes professed under the engaging name of "Scientific Humanism." Its creed is that all science is one; that scientific explanations all presuppose general laws; and that every happening has a scientific explanation, if not in fact then in principle. "Scientific Humanism" may be defended on diverse grounds: by metaphysical proofs showing that unless it were accepted, discourse would be impossible; by arguments about the direction in which science is progressing; by pragmatic considerations; by deduction from a

religious faith like Deism. It may be assailed on grounds as various. Since such considerations, although proper, are beyond my present scope, I must be content to record a few pertinent facts: (1) explanations of historical actions are, in our present state of knowledge, independent of general laws; (2) many such explanations are verifiable and verified; (3) their subsumption under general laws, though possible *a priori*, is at present purely visionary; (4) the social sciences have not established any genuine laws, and much of what they have accomplished has been fruit of the historical method. These facts do not refute "Scientific Humanism," but they may discourage us from persevering with it.

## MICHAEL SCRIVEN

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### Tuismis as the Grounds for Historical Explanations<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Problem.* Some historical explanations appear to be so well supported by the evidence that we cannot reasonably doubt them. A very plausible current analysis of historical explanations leads to the conclusions

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1. I am greatly indebted to Paul Edwards for much painstaking and helpful criticism.

that an explanation can only be beyond reasonable doubt when (a) we have general laws that are also beyond reasonable doubt and (b) we are in a position to make predictions that are beyond reasonable doubt. Yet it appears that historians are not in possession of such general laws nor in a position to make such predictions.

I here propose an alternative analysis which is consistent with the existence of good explanations and the non-existence of *comparably* good laws and predictions. But I do not thereby deny the existence of *rough* generalizations about behavior, and predictions which are *sometimes* highly probable. Let us begin by examining the analysis of explanations which produces the paradox.

2. *The Deductive Model of Explanation.* Suppose we wish to explain why William the Conqueror never invaded Scotland. The answer, as usually given, is simple enough; he had no desire for the lands of the Scottish nobles, and he secured his northern borders by defeating Malcolm, King of Scotland, in battle and exacting homage.<sup>2</sup> There seem to be no laws involved in this explanation. But what makes us so sure that it is the correct explanation? Might not someone with no desire for the lands, and with no fears about invasion, nevertheless invade? There might perhaps be word of some great treasure stored in Malcolm's castles. Unless such possibilities are ruled out, we cannot be sure that the explanation given is adequate. Furthermore, we cannot assume that what look like good reasons against invasion actually were the decisive factors in this case unless we have some definite information about William's reasonableness. For the explanation to be watertight, it will have to contain many such facts about the situation and the participants. And the only way in which such facts, however numerous, can guarantee the explanation is via the truth of some *general* proposition that connects such facts with such an effect—for the further particular proposition asserting temporal adjacency is no guarantee of causal efficacy. To sum up: one set of facts cannot be a watertight explanation of another fact unless we can guarantee they are adequate to produce it—and the only kind of guarantee that connects facts is a law. Failing such a law, we cannot be certain our explanation is adequate, and even if it is not inadequate it may instead be redundant or irrelevant. Having such a law, and being in possession of the explanatory facts, we are in a position to predict the exact occurrence to be explained. If we were not, if some other event is implied by these facts and laws, then we most certainly lack an explanation of what actually happens. Indeed it is in just such a situation, where our knowledge leads us to expect something other than the actual occurrence, that we call for an explanation.

Such, in brief, is the argument that ties together the certainty of explanations with the possession of laws and the possibility of predictions. In its most convincing form, it is due to Professor C. G. Hempel.<sup>3</sup> I refer to it as "the deductive model of explanation" because it proposes as a criterion

2. E.g., *Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. I, p. 585.

3. "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy*, 1942, reprinted in Feigl and Sellars, *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, also in the present

for good explanations the deducibility of a statement of the facts to be explained from statements of the antecedent conditions and relevant laws. I have the greatest respect for its powers, its interest, and its adherents, but I shall argue that it is wrong, not only in detail but in conception. Whether my criticisms are persuasive or not, I hope they will have some interest in so far as they bear on the nature of historical knowledge, judgment, and understanding.

3. *Survey of Difficulties with the Deductive Model.* It will perhaps help the reader to find his way in the paper if I now adumbrate briefly my main objections to the deductive model of historical explanation, not all of which I shall deal with in any detail here. I argue (3.1) that it can be formulated only by ignoring the distinction between an explanation and its justification; (3.2) that this distinction opens the way for abandoning the need for laws (and that the logical arguments for the necessity of such laws are unsound); (3.3) that such laws are not available even in the physical sciences, and, if they were, would not provide explanations of much interest; (3.4) that history possesses in abundance the only kind of general statement required for good explanations; (3.5) that the logical argument for correlation of good predictions with good explanations is not formally sound and has a limited range of application and little practical significance even in that range; that good predictions are impossible in large areas of the natural and applied sciences where simple quantitative laws and measuring techniques are not available; but that in such areas, as in history, good explanations of the poorly predictable events are commonly available; (3.6) that more illuminating analogues for historical explanation can be found in procedures such as "explaining the way," "explaining how something works," "explaining what something means," and in notions such as "dramatic inevitability," rather than in subsumption under physical laws.

Two of these objections (3.3 and 3.5) are founded upon an examination of the physical sciences into which I shall not enter here,<sup>4</sup> and comparatively brief reference will be made to them. The remainder will be treated in less detail than I think is required for an adequate defense of them, but I hope at sufficient length to indicate the possibility and perhaps interest of an alternative analysis of historical explanations.

3.1. *Explanations and Their Justifications.* When scientists were asked to explain the variations in apparent brightness of the orbiting second-stage rocket that launched the first of our artificial satellites, they replied that it was due to its axial rotation and its asymmetry. This explanation, perhaps illustrated by moving a pencil through the air while turning it, was perfectly adequate even for the newsmen. Yet it contains no laws. Why then should we feel any inadequacy about an historical explanation such as the one

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volume, p. 344 ff., above. But Mill, as Bury points out, already saw the main point (*System of Logic*, Bk. VI); and before him d'Holbach, d'Alembert and Condorcet (see Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability*).

4. Forthcoming in Vol. III of *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Univ. of Minn. Press).

about William (in 2 above) simply because it lacks laws? It would be said (to apply the general defense of the deductive model given above) that a "complete" or "proper" statement of the explanation must contain laws in order that the alleged consequence can be *deduced*; and that only in the scientific case just quoted can this be done, since we do not have in our possession laws adequate to complete the historical explanation. All that the latter provides, indeed, is "... something that might be called an *explanation sketch*. Such a sketch consists of a more or less vague indication of the laws and initial conditions considered as relevant, and it needs 'filling out' in order to turn into a full-fledged explanation. This filling-out requires further empirical research, for which the sketch suggests the direction. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Now I have an alternative description of what Hempel calls explanation-sketches (and which include the scientists' account of the rocket phenomenon as well as the historians' account of William's non-invasion of Scotland). I regard them as explanations as they stand, not incomplete in any sense in which they should be complete, but certainly not including the *grounds* which we should give if pressed to support them. Just as we must distinguish a statement about the population of the ancient Greek city of Poscidonis (Paestum) from our grounds for believing it, so we must distinguish the statement of an explanation from our grounds for putting it forward as such; and amongst these grounds a further distinction is useful.

It may be the case that we have insufficient grounds for the assertions actually occurring in what we normally call an explanation; and in that case we would certainly be justified in complaining that the explanation was ill-supported or—in the event of actual falsehood—inaccurate. Or it may be that the statements offered are well-supported and true but do not fully *explain* what they were supposed to explain; and here we might plausibly say that the explanation is incomplete or *inadequate*. And, thirdly, it may be that, through misunderstanding, the proposed explanation is not of the *kind* required; then we would describe it as inappropriate or *irrelevant*. I think we can more profitably employ this tripartite division of the deficiencies of explanations than the single blanket terms "incorrect" or "incomplete" or "improper." The kinds of grounds which are required for defense against the errors of inaccuracy (which I take to include extreme dubiety), inadequacy, and irrelevance are radically different. The first comprise our evidence for the truth of the statements actually made, and I shall refer to them as *truth-justifying grounds*. These would include our evidence for supposing that William did not want the lands of Scotland, for example. The second consist in our grounds for thinking that the statements made are adequate for a certain task—the task of explaining (in *some way*) whatever it is they are supposed to explain. I shall refer to them as *role-justifying grounds*; and it is in this category that the general laws lacking from our "explanation-sketches" would go, if we had them. The third group support our interpretation of the practical requirements of the person or public to whom we address our explanation—for example, that they need

5. Hempel, see p. 351, above.

an explanation of someone's behavior in terms of his intentions rather than his muscular operations, or of the rocket's variation in apparent brightness in terms of properties of the rocket rather than the mechanism of vision. The considerations which lead us to propose one rather than another type of explanation I shall call *type-justifying grounds*.

To illustrate the whole set of distinctions consider the attempt to explain why Cortes sent out a third expedition to Baja California after the failure of the first two. Characteristically, we first judge from the context that the type of explanation required is probably in terms of his reasons rather than his character, and certainly in terms of those rather than the neurophysiology of his brain processes. We might make the first of these type-judgments on the grounds that such replies as "He was just stubborn" here leave unanswered what appears to be an important part of the question, viz., Cortes' motives. But it is not entirely clear from the inadequate description of the context that such an inference is justified. It is more clear that *some* restrictions on the type of explanation can be reasonably inferred from the fact that an individual historical figure is involved, and thus a general reply in terms of the neurophysiology of decision processes is not appropriate. This is not to say that in *certain* cases, a *specific* neurophysiological account may not be perfectly appropriate in a historical explanation: monarchs can have brain tumors with an effect on history not translatable into the language of reasons and instincts. It is to say that a general account of Cortes' brain processes, perfectly true though it might be, would be of no value just because it is both true and general, i.e., it would not tell us what it was specifically about this man at this time that led him to this decision. It is perfectly true that the apparent brightness of the rocket varies because a varying number of photons is passing into the retina of the observer; but this would also be true if the rocket were symmetrical and being illumined by a light-source of variable brightness, etc., and our interest lies in having one of these states of the *particular object* of enquiry selected out for us as the explanation, i.e., in being told whether it is the shape and motion of the rocket or the varying illumination of it that is responsible for what we see. Again, in certain contexts it might be appropriate to give an elaborate explanation involving laws and analogies, etc.; whereas in other contexts a simpler type of explanation is entirely adequate. Sometimes explanations consist simply in denying what is apparently a presupposition of the enquirer (see below), sometimes they require the provision of a great deal of new knowledge, sometimes an assertion of the relevance of old knowledge. These lead to differences in the type of explanation which we might call complexity-differences of type as opposed to category-differences of type (general physiological, particular external causal, particular intentions, characterological, etc.).

Yet in both the cases given in the last paragraph we can imagine contexts (e.g., class discussions in cybernetics or the physiology of vision) where exactly the explanation we have excluded would be the appropriate one: where the mention of Cortes' name or the rocket is intended merely to lend a little interest to the illustration. The possibility of making such an



error—remote though it is—demonstrates the existence of an inference from type-justifying grounds to the conclusion that a certain type of explanation is relevant or inappropriate. Not that the inference is made and applied explicitly; its conclusion is simply *expressed* by giving an answer of a certain type. The only error involved in giving the wrong type of answer is inappropriateness; it does not explain what it is supposed to explain, but it is not inaccurate, nor incapable of explaining through inadequacy. There is no such thing as *the* explanation of something unless a decision is made about *type*.

Now it would be absurd to include considerations of the kind involved in selecting the type of explanation, as *part of the explanation itself*. Yet there is no essential difference between doing that and including role- or truth-justifying grounds in the explanation. In the present case, having made a rough decision about the type of answer to give, we might next consider what particular reasons or character traits or combination of these actually explain Cortes' behavior. Suppose we accept the view which Merriam appears to favor in *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*: that the prospect of gigantic booty, and considerable confidence that by leading the expedition himself the previous causes of failure could be overcome, were the determining factors. There are still two avenues of attack on this account; and correspondingly we may produce in defense either (i) our grounds for supposing that Cortes did in *fact* anticipate the taking of great wealth from the natives and their land, and that he did in fact believe the expedition would succeed under his guidance—the grounds might be the evidence of diaries, eyewitness reports in correspondence, etc.—or (ii) our grounds for supposing that these facts do *explain* his action; exactly what these grounds are is the disputed question, which we shall shortly examine in detail. These two kinds of grounds are, respectively, truth-justifying and role-justifying. Notice once more the peculiarity of insisting that remarks about diaries and correspondence must necessarily form part of the explanation of Cortes' decision. They *are* properly part of the evidence for our assertion that he had certain considerations in mind. They are *not* properly part of an explanation (of one of his actions) which affirms that he *had* these considerations in mind. Similarly, the laws of inertia and optics are not part of the scientists' explanation of the rocket-phenomenon in the context described (and there is no such thing as "the [correct] explanation," independently of context), though they are required for its justification; and whatever it is we produce as grounds for supposing that Cortes' economic motives and risk-evaluation explain his decision is not part of the explanation itself.

It may appear that we are quibbling over words here, that it is of little importance to decide exactly what is included in an explanation and what in its justification. Now the only goal of the logician dealing with the concept of explanation is to provide an accurate account of the procedure of giving an explanation as compared with, say, a description or—presumably—a justification. Moreover, if one hopes to extract from one's analysis some practical consequences for the careful historian and the historiographer, as

Hempel certainly does, then one must not judge in advance what is or is not going to be an important distinction. I hope that I shall succeed in showing that the distinction just made has extremely important consequences for the historiographer, and that they are diametrically opposed to those to which Hempel is led. This importance in application we shall now attempt to demonstrate.

It is clear that the procedure of justifying assertions about historical figures, whether they be causal or not, does not necessarily end at any particular point; having come to the diaries we may have to go on and defend our ascription of particular authors to them, etc. These further grounds, grounds for supposing our first-level grounds to be true, can be called *second-level grounds*. This regress connects up with and can be dealt with analogously to the old puzzle about complete explanations—how can anything ever be completely explained, when, in order to explain anything, we must appeal to something else which we have not explained? The answer to this is, of course, that an explanation is essentially a linkage of what we do not understand to what we do understand, and there can be no such linkage if we understand *nothing*; so the idea of a complete explanation (in this sense) is the idea of a linkage of two things when there is only one thing to link, and, like the sound of one hand clapping, is a logical echo, a thing of no substance whose loss is no loss. Similarly, we can never give a “complete” justification of a statement; but to say this is only to say that justifications have to begin. It is better not to use the word “complete” in such a sense, thereby abandoning any possibility of ever applying it, for we normally use it in the perfectly good sense of “providing enough evidence to make doubt unreasonable.” Exactly how much this is, will depend upon the context, upon what kind of doubts are being considered and what kind of assertion is being made (singular, universal, statistical, theoretical, observational, etc.).

Apply our treatment of these puzzles to the Hempelian notion of a complete explanation. At first it seems quite different; for in this case a natural stopping-point appears. An explanation will be said to be complete when it enables the deduction of the fact to be explained from at least one law plus antecedent conditions. Notice that if mere deduction were required, any statement of fact (or law) could be deduced from a logically trivial inflation of it (e.g., its double negation) and would thereby be completely explained! Would it not be a little remarkable if by merely widening the compass of the deduction to include a law we could convert the analysis into a universal panacea for all explanation-needs? Is it not going to be likely that this kind of “complete explanation” will in some contexts provide too much and in some too little, and in others the wrong type of explanation or even no explanation at all? Indeed, is there not a possibility that in some cases we cannot give it but can nevertheless give an excellent explanation? I shall argue that the answer to all these questions is affirmative.

Now it is true that, by comparison with the sense of “complete” in the elementary puzzle of the last paragraph, Hempel’s notion correctly avoids the analogous temptation of saying that an explanation is incomplete when

it does not explicitly include its *second-level* grounds (and then the third-level . . .). But is it not the case that in requiring the explanation to include not merely the facts which are produced (e.g., about the rocket's shape or Cortes' aim) but also the *first-level* role-justifying grounds, Hempel actually takes one step of just the same persuasive but illegitimate regress? His argument for insisting on the inclusion of such grounds in any "complete" explanation is simply that without them we cannot be sure we have the correct explanation. It is also true that without evidence for the statements of fact we put forward as the explanation in the contexts described, we would not have a correct explanation; and the same applies to our judgment of explanation-type. Yet we clearly recognize the illegitimacy of claiming that for completeness' sake, our evidence for these judgments should be included in the explanation. It should be seen from the beginning that the completeness or correctness of an explanation is a notion without meaning except in a given context from which the type can be inferred and in which the required facts are known. This is greatly obscured by the supposition that in science there is always something known as *the* explanation of a particular phenomena regardless of context. On the contrary, there are many non-competing types of explanation for scientific phenomena, just as for historical. We are misled, because there is a considerable communality of context in discussions amongst scientists with similar training and interests; but there is no way of deciding whether "the" explanation of the Buddle effect in chlorine (its increase in volume upon exposure to light) is the thermodynamic one or the photochemical one or both, without some context being provided as basis for a type-judgment. Given details of the context, we can here, as in history, produce facts and not laws as a perfectly adequate explanation and can reject the claim that *completeness* requires more, while freely conceding that *justification* will require more—perhaps role-justifying grounds, perhaps also (or instead) truth- or type-justifying grounds. For justifying, too, as we have seen, is not a procedure for which a type or amount can be specified independently of context. And a justification, no less than an explanation, is complete if it does exactly what is (properly) required in the context.

It is not merely that we can, in certain contexts, *assume* that the audience has no need to be reminded of the relevant laws—although this is important enough, and one could hardly propose an analysis of, e.g., "political joke" or "scientific discovery" according to which they were essentially incomplete unless the entire background was also presented. Explanations are practical, context-bound affairs, and they are merely converted into something else when set out in full deductive array. Just as the joke becomes, when all the context is laboriously presented, a sociological explanation of a joke (and is usually no longer funny), so the explanation when dressed in its deductive robes becomes a proof or a justification of an explanation (and usually no longer explains but demonstrates). And the scientific discovery would become a chapter in a history of science.

But the situation is far more serious; for this preliminary failure to see that explanation is a valuable but workaday notion, very different from its

Sunday cousin, deductive justification, leads Hempel to overlook the possibility of highly verifiable explanations for which *the general laws cannot be formulated*. The Sunday raiment is not always available, even for the hardest-working explanation.

3.2. *Explanations without Laws*. Once we remove from an explanation's back the burden of its own proof we are in a better position to see the criteria for judging both. A striking feature of the family of explanations is their diversity of types—and it appears quite possible that a different kind of justification may be required for each type of explanation. An extraordinary attempt has been made in the literature of this subject to identify explanations with the answers to Why questions. The most cursory examination of both scientific and historical writing makes it clear that there are many occasions when questions beginning What, How, Who, Which, Where and When produce explanations; and explanations are also given in response to the raising of eyebrows, and in public lectures where no-one asks or has in mind *any* question.<sup>6</sup> The criterion of the Why question as stimulus must be modified to require only the possibility of such a question. But if explanations are the answers to *possible* Why questions, it is readily shown they are also answers to, e.g., possible What questions, since "Why did Cortes go?" is different only in being less precise than "What caused (or convinced) Cortes to go?" I think the Why-criterion was produced because of a dim recognition that contexts determine whether a statement (or set of statements) constitutes an explanation; and I think that it fails because syntactical form is an unreliable indicator of those context differences that distinguish explanations—in the very sense intended by the authors concerned—from, e.g., descriptions. Certainly there are sets of statements which in one context would be regarded as perfect explanations and in another as mere descriptions, and in another as inappropriate responses to a request for an explanation, etc.

The question naturally arises whether we can give any enlightening short characterization of an explanation at all, or whether the concept is one of those which we only come to understand in depth via the colligation of a great variety of examples, each sharing some properties with some others but lacking any non-trivial, wholly common properties (some candidates are "thing," "state," "scientific method," "game," "vehicle," "clock," "language," "machine"). If it is any help to say that explanations must produce understanding and not simply knowledge, this can be said. We know twice two is four, the date of our birthday, the color of the carpet; but this knowledge does not in itself consist in understanding something; something further is involved in understanding how an intelligent man could buy a carpet of this color, etc. To be more specific about explanations than this is to restrict the concept; and the apparent attractions of so doing have

6. It is clear in Hempel and Oppenheim's monograph "The Logic of Explanation" (Feigl and Brodbeck, *Readings in the Philosophy of Sciences*, p. 319) that they take the Why-What difference to distinguish explanation from "mere description." But Dray discusses explanations in response to How questions in "Explanatory Narrative in History," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 1954, pp. 15-27.

proved to be largely illusory. The increased managability has always been offset by corresponding limitations on the scope of any conclusions about what standards should be met by *sound* explanations, since such conclusions require proving that other types of explanation are *unsound*, not merely explanations in *another sense*.

In so far as there are different respects in which one can be said to lack understanding of an act, a condition, a tendency, a law, etc., so far there are different ways in which it can be explained. For historical explanation this *does not* have the consequence that explanations are judged by some purely subjective standard of empathetic acceptability, since to say an historical phenomenon is understood is not to say someone (or everyone) *thinks* he understands it. There are objective tests for understanding just as for knowing or inferring. They happen not to be syntactical tests as are (supposedly) those for deducing; but then explanation is not a syntactical but a pragmatic notion. If we want to know whether someone understands William's failure to invade Scotland, we know the kind of question to ask him over and above the questions which tell us whether he knows that William did in fact fail to invade Scotland. If we want to know whether someone understands the rules of succession in the Hanoverian monarchy, we produce another type of question; but again it is not just a simple question intended to elicit knowledge of some specific fact about the rules. The most obvious difference is that *more* knowledge is required before a claim of understanding can be justified. More accurately, *what* one understands is something *different* from what one knows: one understands an *action*, one knows *when an action occurs* or *who* does it, etc.; or one understands a *body of constitutional law*, whereas one knows *what the laws are*, etc. Very loosely, this difference is brought out by saying that understanding (and hence explanation) involves *knowing all about* something with respect to a certain category of questions. Thus to understand an action involves, in some contexts, knowing about the motives for it, the character of the actor and the circumstances of the action; and it is easy to see where the deductive model fits in here, offering a criterion for exactly what one has to know, viz., any law and statements of particular fact such that they entail the description of the act. To this claim we shall return immediately; but first notice the hopelessness of such an analysis of understanding the rules of Hanoverian succession. No physical laws are deductively invoked in the explanation of these; explanation here consists in exegetical clarification and examination of the relations between the rules, e.g., with respect to consistency, redundancy, function, etc.

A *second* question would concern the *origin* of the rules or their development. It has commonly been argued that only the latter question is a request for an historical explanation. But the first kind of explanation meets two possible criteria; it occurs in history books, and it is a proper answer to Why questions, e.g., Why couldn't a Hanoverian king's nephew always (legitimately) succeed? Now it is certainly not a *specifically historical* kind of explanation, since it occurs also in text-books of law, for example. This is an objection that Hempel would scarcely bring, since he is arguing for

the essential similarity of historical explanations and, in his case, scientific explanations, the difference being only the restriction of the latter to the past. And that restriction is met by the study of *Hanoverian* rather than current institutions.

In short it seems clear that historians provide some explanations which in no sense involve laws of nature; and we may add to the example given a wide range of other types, including, for example, the explanation of the symbolism of the Imperial regalia at a coronation (the relevance to other social sciences such as anthropology being evident).

The value of these examples lies not only in their downright contradiction of the too-glib assumption that only the *causal explanation of events* concerns historians (an assumption which also happens to be false for physics, and which anyhow does not save the deductive model) but in the light they throw on certain types of explanation which tend to be forced into the deductive mold in the absence of alternatives. Consider the problem of explaining the *significance* of a certain action or trend of actions—the assassination of an Archduke, or a wave of selling in steels. Naturally there is some connection between the significance of an action and its causes and effects (“its significance as a manifestation of . . .”), but does this make such explanations causal explanations? Certainly it does not; for, in the first place, to list and evaluate the important effects of an action is not to subsume it under a causal law, not to give a causal explanation of it. In explaining the significance of an event (or trend, or condition)—and there are few more common types of explanation in history—we are not trying to show why, given its antecedent conditions, it was to be expected, but rather to show that, given that it happened, it was of a certain importance. Putting it bluntly, we are discussing the event in terms of an evaluation of its effects rather than a listing of its causes. And it will not do to say that we are “really” explaining *its effects in terms of it*, since the enquirer may not have *any* idea of the event’s consequences. This makes it very unsatisfactory to say he’s “really” looking for an explanation of *them*.

Perhaps there still hangs over us the Damoclean sword devised by Hume to make uneasy the armchairs of philosophers who talk of causes and deny laws. But the sense in which Hume said a law is involved in a causal assertion hardly suffices to establish the deductive model of explanation *in toto*. Even if Hume was correct, it only follows that each particular causal statement is an instance of a law; it does not follow that the *explanation of* (the significance of) event E consists in a *deduction of E from laws plus* antecedent conditions. Furthermore, though I do not have the space to prove it here, Hume’s argument can be saved only by a modification which eliminates what Hempel defines as a law.<sup>7</sup>

At this stage we could go on to examine further types of historical explanation which seem most appropriately analyzed without mention of laws, but to describe them convincingly we need first to examine the

7. The point is somewhat elaborated in another paper, “The Present Status of Determinism in Physics,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 1957, pp. 727-733. See also the Appendix to the present paper.

plausibility of Hempel's analysis for Hempel's own examples. For it is important to see that his analysis is itself most inapplicable to actual cases, and the reasons for this, before we accept it as an analysis of good (or even ideal) explanation.

The preceding section, 3.1, sought to establish the gulf between explanations and their justifications. It follows that from the form of an explanation (which is given) one cannot infer a *unique* form for its justification (which is not given); as long as the right *types* and *combination* of grounds are produced, their exact content can vary considerably. Suppose we explain Cortes' action in Merriman's way (by appeal to his cupidity and confidence), and suppose we accept Hempel's criterion of deducibility, then any combination of laws and antecedent conditions from the following sets would constitute a formal justification of the explanation (would "complete" the "explanation-sketch," in Hempel's terminology):

- I (i) All confident wealth-seeking people undertake any venture which offers wealth.
- (ii) The third voyage envisioned by Cortes offered wealth.
- (iii) Cortes was confident and wealth-seeking.
  
- II (i) All confident people seeking very great wealth undertake any venture which offers very great wealth.
- (ii) The third voyage envisioned by Cortes offered very great wealth.
- (iii) Cortes was confident and seeking very great wealth.
  
- III (i) All confident people with Cortes' background of experience, seeking very great wealth, undertake any venture involving the hazards of this one, which offers very great wealth.
- (ii) The third voyage envisioned by Cortes involved the hazards that it involved and offered very great wealth.
- (iii) Cortes was confident and had Cortes' background of experience and was seeking very great wealth.

This series admits of both padding—by interpolating further sets between, e.g., II and III—and extending—by continuing beyond III. But as it stands it illustrates an awkward dilemma for the deductive model. Set I (where, in our terminology, (i) is a role-justifying ground, (ii) and (iii) are the explanation itself) clearly satisfies the requirement of deducibility, i.e., of entailing what is to be explained, and has a nice straightforward general law in (i) and nice straightforward antecedent conditions in (ii) and (iii). But (i) is obviously and hopelessly false. The sensible move, in order to "save the explanation" (as the deductive-model supporters would put it), is to see whether some modification of the general law cannot be found which is true and which *can* be applied by supplementation of the antecedent conditions from our considerable stock of other knowledge about the man and the situation. Set II is an attempt at this; again it satisfies Hempel's formal requirement of deducibility, and would be a good expla-

nation if only the statements were correct. Alas, even though less hopelessly wrong than I (i), the law II (i) is clearly much too general to be true. One can be entirely clear about the correctness of the explanation of Cortes' action in terms of his greed, etc., and not in any way committed to a belief in II (i). But there looms ahead the embarrassing threat of III (i), which seems a natural result of trying to state the law more precisely. The embarrassments of III consist in the increasing triviality of the components. The "law" has become more trivial, i.e., less general, in the course of becoming more nearly correct and now appears quite possibly to have only one instance, viz., Cortes in this situation. The "antecedent conditions," instead of invoking more of our knowledge about the circumstances, actually have no new (identifiable) empirical content, though they contain an empty gesture or two in the direction of our further knowledge.

Is there not *some* way in which we can improve II without falling into the trap of III, with its law which we can regard as a mere dressing-up in general terms of exactly the "explanation-sketch" we are supposed to be "filling-out"? Just as the deductive model would be an absurdity if it allowed deduction from the double-negation of the description of whatever it is to be explained (since then any true statement would be explained by its double negation), so it would be an absurdity if it allowed deduction from laws which were obtained by pseudo-generalization of an explanation-sketch we have rejected as "incomplete." If I say cupidity and confidence explain Cortes' action and I am told this is not a satisfactory explanation, the criticism is rendered trivial if I am allowed to avoid it by muttering that I really meant: "Everyone with confidence and cupidity and otherwise just like Cortes and in just such a situation, will undertake such a venture; and Cortes had confidence and cupidity." The "law" must be applicable, and "just like" is too vague for application. Hempel says it must have the form: "In every case where an event of a specified kind C occurs at a certain place and time, an event of a specified kind E will occur at a place and time which is related in a specified manner to the place and time of the occurrence of the first event."<sup>8</sup> Now "specified kind" presumably does not include something as vague as "just like this." At any rate, either it does, in which case it appears any explanation-sketch is trivially completable, or it does not, in which case it appears we have never found a law of the kind required and hence have no right to the certainty with which we affirm some historical explanations.

I do not assume the second horn of this dilemma established by my treatment of one example; but a moment's thought makes clear that the actual process of filling-in between II and III (or their analogues in any other case), giving closer and closer non-trivial descriptions of the circumstances C, will do no more than make one feel it more and more *probable* that such a C will be an E, and at no stage could one, with much confidence, make the universal claim that "Every C is an E." (Weakening the universal law to a probability assertion shatters the deductive model, as we shall see.) But a much more important alternative to this case must first be

8. See p. 345, above.



considered. The very idea that we should lose faith in an explanation because we cannot formulate a role-justifying ground for it is absurd. Let us take a case where we can be sure beyond any reasonable doubt that we have a correct explanation and let us see whether we can formulate the required Hempelian laws. As you reach for the dictionary, your knee catches the edge of the table and thus turns over the ink-bottle, the contents of which proceed to run over the table's edge and ruin the carpet. If you are subsequently asked to explain how the carpet was damaged you have a complete explanation. You did it, by knocking over the ink. The certainty of this explanation is primeval. It has absolutely nothing to do with your knowledge of the relevant laws of physics; a cave-man could supply the same account and be quite as certain of it. Now it is quite true that the *truth* of this explanation is empirical and in this sense it depends on the laws of nature. But its *certainty* has nothing to do with your ability to quote the laws. You have some knowledge about what happens when you knock things over, but so does the cave-man, and this kind of knowledge is totally unlike knowledge of the laws of nature: If you were asked to produce the role-justifying grounds for your explanation, what could you do? *You could not produce any true universal hypothesis* in which the antecedent was identifiably present (i.e., which avoids such terms as "knock hard enough"), and the consequent is the effect to be explained. If you tried to find something you did know to be true, it would have to be something like: "If you knock a table hard enough it will cause an ink-bottle that is not too securely or distantly or specially situated to spill over the edge (if it has enough ink in it)." But even this needs tightening up in a dozen ways to get the table loose, and the carpet stained. The best we can do is to modify it with a "probably" before the word "cause." It then becomes a truism—who could deny it, but who would bother to say it? Moreover it does not save the deductive model. There is no universal hypothesis which will; and one looks to physics for them in vain. For the explanation has become not one whit more certain since the laws of elasticity and inertia were discovered; and psychology is just as irrelevant to the corresponding historical explanations, which are already beyond doubt. The simple fact must be faced that certain evidence is adequate to guarantee certain explanations without the benefit of deduction from laws.

Now one important point can be made about the relationship of such explanations to the laws of physics that expresses part of the deductive model's *point*. In saying that our knocking over the ink caused the damage, we are committing ourselves to the view that laws of nature will not be found to contradict this assertion of a connexion. One *might* put this by saying that in certain cases we are in a position to judge, not that certain specifiable laws apply, but that *some* laws must apply. But it is *very* odd to say this rather than that we can sometimes be quite sure of causal statements even when we do not know any relevant laws. This capacity for identifying causes is learnt, is better developed in some people than in others, can be tested, and is the basis for what we call *judgments*.

Let it be noted that Hempel's own and only detailed example of an

explanation from the physical sciences, on which he founds his analysis, is *conceded by him* not to be sufficiently well formulated to meet his own criteria: "... even that much more detailed statement of determining conditions and universal hypotheses would require amplification in order to serve as a sufficient basis for the deduction of the conclusion. . . ." The physicist *judges*, inductively, and from his knowledge and experience, what the explanation is; and the judgment cannot be converted into a deduction. The historian does no less and it would surely be unfair to ask him to do more.

Yet can the deductive model not be saved by the substitution of probability-statements for universal hypotheses? Indeed it cannot, for one cannot *deduce* from any law of the form "If C then probably E," combined with the antecedent condition C, that E occurs. One can only deduce that E *probably* occurs, and we are not trying to explain a probability but an event. So the criterion of deduction must be abandoned if the criterion of universal hypotheses is abandoned; and what is then left of the deductive model? We have instead an *inductive* model of explanation, where for laws we have probability tuisms, and for deduction probability inference. But in what sense does such an analysis provide an improved or more complete kind of explanation, an ideal model of explanation? In none, for what is to be gained by quoting tuisms rather than particular and relevant causal judgments? What is added to, or "completed" about, our explanation of the damaged carpet by production of some tuism concerning the probable effect of knocking tables on which ink-bottles stand? And in history what is gained by Merriman's explanation of Cortes' action if he adds that sufficient confidence and a great desire for wealth may well lead a man to undertake a hazardous and previously unsuccessful venture?

Can we do no better than this? Indeed we can formulate universal hypotheses which become less and less obviously false, but never one that appears to be true. And, more to the point, why should we be committed to any that we can formulate? The causal judgment itself we will support; but we do it directly, not via some yet to be propounded and then dubious laws. Is it not absurd to talk of supporting a causal judgment except via a law? Well, what laws do I produce in support of my causal analysis of the damaged carpet? I tell you in particular detail what happened (my truth-justifying grounds), and if you push for role-justifying grounds, I produce the tuism. A gap remains, a logical possibility of error due to the sloppiness of the tuism with its terms like "hard enough," etc. But logical possibilities of error are no concern to any scientist, and in the face of the detailed description given, what *reasonable* possibility of error can be pointed out that should be excluded? There is none: what else *could possibly* have been the cause in such a case?

In the Cortes case, we know about his confidence and greed, we know the tuism that makes the possession of such characteristics a possible explanation, but we also count pretty heavily on another vague proposition

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 348, above.

(though it can be incorporated into the first one) to the effect that if a man has these characteristics and does undertake a hazardous voyage and there are no other apparent causes, then it is *very* probable these were the causes. We can do something towards filling in the list of other possible causes from our stock of truisms about behavior; though of course it's not often that we are called on to do so, i.e., that we are pushed to second-level grounds. But *we* recognize such possible causes very reliably indeed, and in examining the evidential situation, any indications of the presence of one of them rings an alarm in the mind of the practiced historian. One may say that an historian's *principles of judgment* are most nearly, though inadequately, expressed in the form of truisms; and one sees immediately why historians have fought shy of producing these as "the laws on which their explanations are based." They are trivial, though not empty; and can only look like shoddy pre-scientific laws, whereas historical explanations are neither shoddy nor pre-scientific. The paradox is resolved by seeing that the sense in which good historical explanations are based on such truisms is simply that the explanations can only be denied by someone who is prepared to deny such an obviously true statement (assuming he is attacking the role-justifying dimension of support). The truism tells us nothing *new* at all; but it says *something* and it says something *true*, even if vague and dull. It ill fits into a deductive proof; but it has no need to do so, since the justification of an explanation is a context-dependent *inductive* procedure (and not necessarily a *predictively* useful procedure).

Three final and important points. There is nothing unusual to science about the use of reliable procedures of inference, even predictive inference, which cannot be stated in terms of applicable principles. The trained ear of the musician, the trained eye of the lumberman or the tracker, the professional hands of the cheese-maker—all these embody skills which undoubtedly exist, enable accurate diagnosis and/or prediction, *and cannot be expressed in terms of statements which others can objectively apply to perform the same tasks*. The great medical diagnosticians may be able to *train* their students to almost the same level of success, but they can formulate very few of the laws according to which they operate, and even when they can, it is not in a form which enables us to go and do likewise. The sophistication of physics lies in its vocabulary and the quantitative nature of its laws; that of clinical medicine in its vocabulary and the acuity of the sensory perceptions required; while history is not sophisticated in any of these ways. But the sophistications mentioned, vital though they are for predictions of some kinds, are in no way necessary for the attainment of explanatory certainty. And in history—unconcerned with predictions—we find the mother subject for explanations. There they are, simple and unadorned, logically no different from those in common-sense talk about people and physical objects (or many of those in physics and clinical medicine), no less certain for being unhampered by the superstructure of theories and instruments, algebras and unobservable entities. The discoveries of scientists may extend the range of historical explanation, but they are not required to underwrite it.

I cannot conclude this section without suggesting to the reader that an historian might view with suspicion a proffered explanation of an historical event which consisted in showing it to be an instance of a universal generalization. I have just argued that Hempelian analysis does not provide necessary conditions for an explanation; now I mention that its claims for sufficiency are equally suspect. To this point I shall return later.

Finally, it may be thought that my "explanations" are simply Hempel's "explanation-sketches," and my truisms loose forms of his laws. This would be an unsatisfactory translation. The important distinction between explanations of any kind is their certainty; and this, I have argued, is quite unconnected with the availability of universal hypotheses, which constitutes Hempel's criterion for judging "explanation-sketches." Explanatory certainty in fact depends on exactly those standards of evidence which we apply in judging explanations of things we see happening. History *always* (but reporting *often*) requires some accessory investigation of witnesses, documents, radio-carbon dating, etc.; but this can often enough be done with enough success to eliminate reasonable doubt. The "universal hypotheses" are entirely mythical; but in any event they are unnecessary. If an historical explanation were found which did involve a universal hypothesis, it would not, in the eyes of historians, be any better for that. Hempel defines his term "universal hypothesis" clearly and it is in his sense that they are mythical; but in no useful alternative sense could one regard truisms as laws which could save the deductive model, since deduction of non-probability statements from them is impossible. Then nothing remains to the model except the claim that, underlying explanations (assumed to be all causal), there are laws which (from the psychologist's point of view) it would be nice for some psychologist to locate, and which history might one day be able to use, but which are neither involved in nor necessary for good historical explanation.

3.3. *The Comparison with the Physical Sciences.* It is worth noting in passing that explanations in the physical sciences, apart from being irrelevant as a model for history since they are connected with predictions in a way historical explanations are not, are by no means examples of the deductive model. A number of the points already made carry over directly to explanations in engineering and applied physics, and we can for the moment ignore any special features of the explanation of laws, since these obviously have little relevance to historical explanation. The most striking demonstration that explanations in physics are not natural subjects for the deductive model is afforded by the failure of Hempel, on his own admission, to produce a single example that meets the conditions. Certainly he gives a perfectly good example of a physical explanation (of the cracking of a radiator in a car left out on a freezing night); but he does not succeed in formulating it in such a way that the required conclusion is entailed by it. The reason is fairly clear; the laws of physics are not truisms but informative laws which can be formulated with some precision and they enable us to explain hitherto obscure phenomena, but *they* too require judgment in their application. To explain something when the only known

relevant general statements are *truisms* requires that the judgment carry most of the weight, e.g., the judgment that "enough" or "too much" or "similar," etc., are here applicable. It is usually unnecessary to mention the relevant truisms while defending an historical explanation, because these are rarely in doubt, only their application; and nothing in their formulation helps us to decide that. In physics, the situation is different. First, we are often concerned to explain rather precisely measured and quantitatively described phenomena; so quantitative relations between their properties will be required. Secondly, these laws are not commonly known (though amongst physicists, where they *are* known, they are rarely quoted in an explanation) and hence may well be exactly what is lacking in the enquirer's understanding of the situation. Thirdly, supporting the causal judgment commonly involves some *calculation* using the law(s), and so brings them in.

Now it might be the case that physical laws could be so formulated and measurements so made as to virtually eliminate the element of judgment; indeed it rarely is required to perform one of its common tasks in historical explanation, the interpretation of the truism's characteristic, vague terms "possible," "naturally," "eventually," etc. But the world is not so simple, and the laws of nature are remarkably imperfect instruments. To begin with, they are never better than approximations. We know of no important quantitative law, in optics, acoustics, thermodynamics, magnetism, gravitation, etc., which is held to be exact.<sup>10</sup> The deviations are not at the limits of measurement but often observable with the grossest instruments. The Gas Laws are good examples; around 6°K the divergence of helium from the value predicted by the laws is of the same order of magnitude as the value itself. The natural reply is to state the laws' *scope* with care. But the scope, i.e., the range of accuracy, varies depending on the size of the permissible error, and in most cases they have no scope at all without measured error. Consequently, *deduction* of the *exact* values to be explained from such laws is a matter of chance.

But cannot the laws be reformulated so that they are exact? Better approximations can be produced, such as Van der Waals' equation which takes account of the finite size of the molecules—an important source of error. But these in turn are inexact for other reasons. The only way an exact form can be obtained is by empirical test at each temperature for each substance under each condition: an infinite task. Speaking practically, one can in some cases take enough readings to provide a basis for a curve which gives the required degree of approximation. When the constant-volume hydrogen gas thermometer was the basis for the temperature scale, the fantastic work involved in this undertaking was done. But already the

10. Certain limit-forms and other non-quantitative forms of, or deviations from, laws are held to be categorically true, e.g., the unattainability form of the Nernst Heat Theorem ("Absolute zero is unattainable"). Of course, there are corresponding "laws" in history e.g. "No one has ever conquered three continents"; but they usually lack an essential ingredient of the physical law which we shall discuss below.

inapplicability of the findings for hydrogen to other gases was apparent, and since 1927 the idea has been abandoned. So the Gas Law is abandoned for the Van der Waals law, and this for the hydrogen graph; and already we have lost both the manageability and the range of application of the simple law. The result, fatal to Hempel's examples, is that no explanation quoting the relatively inaccurate simple forms—all that he mentions—can be regarded as satisfactory in the deductive model, since they are known not to be exactly true. And the obvious and correct reply that they are true *enough*, for explaining most gross phenomena, immediately lets in the element of judgment with respect to terms like "enough," whose absence had appeared to distinguish physical explanations. There are further stages in the dialectic of exploring the extent of this judgment, but the important and originally invisible similarity to the historical examples should now be apparent, as well as the irrelevance of the deductive model to both.

The second source of difficulty with the deductive model in physics arises over the selection of the appropriate laws to invoke. It is by no means sufficient to produce laws which apply somehow or other to a particular phenomenon. A judgment of type is required, as in history; and this judgment must be made in a way which cannot itself be deductively justified from known and exact laws about the people who seek explanations. These two objections attack the deductive model's claim to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for explanation in physics. They are just two of many difficulties for it, but their import can be summed up by saying that in physics one can sometimes provide explanations in terms of laws (since there *are* laws) but that (a) other kinds of explanations are also given and are equally satisfactory and that (b) even the first kind does not fit the deductive model.

A more useful distinction than that between explanations in history and those in physical sciences is a distinction between what we may call *derivation-explanations* and *selection-explanations*, a distinction between kinds of explanation rather than subject matter. In physics the occasional greater relevance of the deductive model is in part due to the fact that understanding a phenomenon described in great numerical detail often requires understanding exactly how its properties can be mathematically derived from certain mathematically expressed physical laws (neither laws nor derivation being absolutely strict). Asking for an explanation may actually be asking for a demonstration of this possibly long and complex derivation; and so we encounter a novel explanation-type, the derivation-explanation. Its novelty lies, not in the *requirement* of inferability, but in the fact that the explanation consists solely in *demonstrating* this. Lest it should be supposed that this is more correctly analyzed as simply a request for a proof, it is worth mentioning an interesting example from the history of physics. For a long time both Hooke and Pardies sought to explain the behavior of a light ray passing from one medium to another (Snell's Law), from the assumption that light was a wave phenomenon. At last the trick was turned by Huygens (*Traité de la Lumière, etc.*, Leyden, 1690), who

produced the proof. This is referred to by Whittaker as "the explanation of refraction";<sup>11</sup> all the premises were already at hand, and only the derivation remained to be found. In this context, the explanation is the derivation. Now this possibility is done little justice by the deductive model, with its syllogistic form, where no student of elementary logic could fail to complete the inference, given the premise. And the deductive model also requires exact truth of the premises and exact deduction, both too strong.

By contrast, there are many cases where the derivation from laws can readily be accomplished but the scientists are, justifiably, concerned to find something more; and it is these cases which lead us to suspect that even if we had laws in history, it would by no means follow that explanation would be facilitated. We shall examine this possibility briefly in a later section. Here I wish to call attention to the extreme opposite of the derivation explanation, the case where we give an explanation which in no way depends on our possession of any exact or even quantitative laws. What we have is a range of formally possible explanations connected with an effect of the observed kind by truisms or definitions (or, perhaps, laws); and on the basis of the facts of the case, we *select* one of the antecedents as the explanation. It is the particular facts, not the general propositions or the derivation, which provides the explanation in such cases. Thus, in the Cortes case, there are several formally possible explanations within the appropriate types. Cortes may have acted under orders, to escape boredom, from stupidity, to avoid recall, etc. We are concerned with selecting from this range the appropriate explanation, and we do so directly from the evidence about his circumstances and character. The point of the explanation is to locate the *relevant* causal antecedent, not to prove it is a possible one; we are not doubting that receiving orders of the appropriate kind can constitute an explanation of a hazardous and previously unsuccessful type of venture, but are unclear (do not understand) whether it was this or something else (in *this* case) that explains the matter. In calling for a derivation-explanation we know the facts and laws but can't see *how* they explain; in the selection-explanation case we know how each possible set of circumstances could explain but we don't know *which* set applies.

In physics we give selection-explanations which depend not on truisms but on genuine laws, as in the explanation of the varying brightness of the sputnik rocket, where we select the shape and motion as the explanation rather than the varying brightness of the sun, or cyclic fatigue of the eye, etc. Do the scientists investigate the antecedents of other possible causal explanations? No; they *judge* they have the right one, just as the historian does: and the historian's judgment, like the physicist's, unformalizable, is aided by "empathy." So physics has a monopoly on derivation-explanations, but also uses selection-explanations. There is no greater virtue in the explanations in *physics* than selection-explanations. For the only surplus value of the physical law over the truism lies in the field of prediction of simple

11. *History of the Theories of the Aether and Electricity*, Vol. I, p. 24. Derivation-explanations are more common in physics because we are often there concerned with explaining laws for which they are usually appropriate.

quantitative phenomena and not in that of explanation, where the only requirement to be met is attainment of that level of certainty and accuracy which the context requires. And step for step, level for level, the explanations based on truisms can match those based on laws; the extra precision of the latter isn't a working part in the machinery of selection-explanations. It does not follow from anything here said that laws cannot be used in historical explanations. They may (obviously) be involved in accessory studies, e.g., tree-ring dating, and hence figure in the second-level grounds for explanations involving date-ascriptions. They could conceivably become more relevant to special cases of historical explanations, e.g., in cases where relative rates of learning are involved. And sloppy laws of the kind which new concepts drag along with them and in which their meaning is to be found, e.g., Freudian ideas, sometimes provide a useful type of general statement intermediate between laws and truisms. I shall say a little more about the general properties of statements that can serve as explanations in the next section. It is worth remembering that the kind of evidence available in history is usually *gross observable behavior descriptions*, and that precise laws about behavior usually require physiological data or other special instrument-requiring data. So truisms are often the *best* we can expect.

3.4. *The Nature of the General Statements in Explanations.* If I want a causal explanation, deduction from a non-causal although universal hypothesis is of no use at all. Sunrise follows sunrise, but I can't *explain* why a sunrise occurs today by producing the perfectly valid deduction of its occurrence from this law plus the fact that there was a sunrise yesterday. The explanation required is presumably in terms of the mechanics of the solar system, and the premise offered merely multiplies the number of instances of the unexplained phenomena. Proponents of the deductive model sometimes argue that an explanation *has* been given here, and what is *now* being asked for (or perhaps what was "really" meant by the original question) is an explanation of the *law* that sunrises follow sunrises. This is an artificial solution, since (a) exactly the same point arises in connection with explaining a law: deduction from a more general law, e.g., about sunrises always occurring on planets in single-star planetary systems would be—almost inevitably—non-explanatory, because it yields no understanding of the motions that lie behind any one case of the sun "rising"; and (b) when I ask for a causal explanation of an event, it may be that what is required will incidentally explain a generalization, but this is hardly proof that it was the generalization which I wanted explained—sometimes one doesn't know the generalization *exists*.

The most natural salvaging move here would be to allow only *causal* laws, not all universal hypotheses, to serve as premises for explanation. This goes too far in the other direction because sometimes we are not seeking a causal explanation, e.g., when explaining the structure of the Egyptian ruling class, but it suggests a most important requirement for the underlying "generalizations." If we are interested in the explanation of a particular event, as is usual in history and common in engineering, astronomy, and applied physics, we are naturally not satisfied unless we are con-



fidest the response actually applies to *this particular event*; and the plausibility of the deductive model in part springs from this necessity for tying down the generalizations to the particular case by *unambiguous statements of antecedent conditions*. This is asking too much, for a variety of reasons that we have discussed before; but it does again suggest a *desirable* criterion for the kind of generalization used as grounds for explanations. The third way in which we can get some idea of what is required is by looking at the inadequacies of a merely statistical generalization as a role-justifying ground; remembering that exact laws are virtually unknown, it is all the more serious that a statement such as "C's cause something quite like E's" or "73% of C's are (or cause) E's" should be profoundly unsatisfactory as a ground for giving C as an explanation of this E. How can we ever be sure that C explains E if we lack exact laws? Is it that we have statistical laws with a *very high* percentage figure, say around 90%, in them? Rather clearly not, since we have almost no reliable statistical *laws* (as opposed to summaries of data at a fixed time or over a given period) outside very limited realms of physics.

The answer I wish to suggest is a radical one. I suggest there is a category of general statements, a hybrid with some universal features and some statistical features, from which alone can be selected the role-justifying grounds for good explanations of individual events. It includes the truisms I have talked about before, many natural laws, some tendency statements and probability statements, and—in other areas less relevant to explaining—rules, definitions, and certain normative statements in ethics. The crucial common property of these statements is best illustrated by examples, but can be described as norm-defining; they have a *selective immunity* to apparent counter-examples. Wishing to indicate their differences from the typical analytic and synthetic statements, as well as their central norm-defining role, I shall refer to them as "normic statements." The statement that "rhombi" means the same as "equilateral parallelograms" ( $N_1$ ) is a typical normic statement. It is not analytic in the way that the statement "Rhombi are equilateral parallelograms" is analytic, because its denial is not self-contradictory.<sup>12</sup> It is not synthetic in the way that "Rhombi are easier for children to draw than circles" is synthetic, because understanding all the terms in it is enough to establish its truth. The relation between the facts of linguistic usage and the truth of such statements as  $N_1$  is not a simple one. On the one hand, if *nobody ever* uses the words in an interchangeable way, we should feel the statement was clearly false. On the other hand, a few erring learners of the geometer's vocabulary can misuse these terms without in *any way* making us view the statement as dubious. Is it not then a statistical report on usage? Essentially not; or at least only in the sense of being non-universal yet non-singular and empirical. In deciding whether it is correct, we apply a very complex analysis to the apparent exceptions. We dismiss exceptions amongst those learning the language, take very little account of those among the rare users, wholly ignore cases

12. But see my "Definitions, Explanations, and Theories," Vol. II, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*.

of code usages, pay some but not much attention to puns or bad crossword-puzzle clues, etc., etc. One might say that the word "rhombi" has a different meaning in these contexts; but  $N_1$  is a reference to no special context, i.e., it refers to the "proper" use, and our problem is exactly that of identifying what counts for and against assertions about the "proper" use.  $N_1$  captures the facts about a certain strand of usage, a strand which we know how to recognize but which could not be accurately described in any manageable statement. My contention is that our descriptive language contains many complex territories inhabited by some genus of normic statement and that we know a great deal about their habits and habitat, although little of it is, and much can scarcely be, explicitly formulated. (Think of the limitations on the formulability of the skilled knowledge of the surgeon, diagnostician, helmsman, swimmer, calculating genius, etc.) In judging definitions in a dictionary or a debate, we call on our system of rating the various instances of usage with respect to the normic genus of meaning-statements, a system which we know well (as language-users) but could ill state.

Analogously, we can deal with normic statements involving the language of rules. The assertion that the penalty for a revoke, in bridge, is two tricks ( $N_2$ ) is not a simple description of what people do, nor of what the rule-book says. Many players ignore it, others do not know it, others misapply it; but (a) it is nevertheless a correct statement, and (b) under suitable empirical circumstances it would be falsified, e.g., if the Contract Bridge Control Board changed the rule, and there was no breakaway faction formed, and tournament committees made no special exceptions, etc. A similar analysis can be applied in many other fields and is, in my opinion, absolutely crucial to a correct understanding of ethical judgements, contrary to the view of those who see the appropriate analogy there to be expressions of feeling or imperatives, etc.

But let us bring these brief general considerations to bear on the present subject. Normic statements about behavior can take various syntactical forms and it is easy to see how they have previously been dismissed too easily, or too readily amalgamated into standard categories. I shall try to select some that might be produced as role-justifying grounds in historical explanations. Consider "A conscientious Secretary of the Treasury would not reveal forthcoming rises in the federal discount rate to his banker acquaintances" ( $N_3$ ); "Strict Orthodox Jews fast on the Day of Atonement" ( $N_4$ ); "Power corrupts" ( $N_5$ ); "Other things being equal a greater number of troops is an advantage in battle" ( $N_6$ ); "Proportional representation tends to give minorities excessive power" ( $N_7$ ); "The American bourgeoisie normally reacts with hostility to those on whom it is dependent" ( $N_8$ ); "A rise in the tariff characteristically produces a decline in the value of imports" ( $N_9$ ); etc. Other modifiers that indicate normic statements are "ordinarily," "typically," "usually," "properly," "naturally," "under standard conditions," "probably." But, as in  $N_1$ ,  $N_2$  and  $N_4$ , no modifier is necessary; and modifiers sometimes have other uses.

One might term the study of normic statements in this area the logic of *guarded generalizations*. None of these assertions is definitionally true

(even though  $N_3$  and  $N_4$  might be called quasi-definitional, they are not analytic), but none can be falsified by the simple procedure involved in dealing with such generalizations as "All members of Parliament in 1700 represented less than 20,000 soids" ( $G_1$ ); "Whenever the tariff rises, the value of imports falls" ( $G_2$ ), etc. Nor are they at all like exact or vague statistical statements involving percentages or "most," "nearly all," etc., though some of these are important and useful as factual assertions in the grounds of explanations. The statistical statement is less informative than the normic statement in a very important way, although an exact statistical statement may be informative in a way a normic statement is not. The statistical statement does not say anything about the things to which it refers except that some do and some do not fall into a certain category. The normic statement says that *everything* falls into a certain category *except* those to which *certain special conditions* apply. And, although the normic statement itself does not explicitly list what count as exceptional conditions, it employs a vocabulary which reminds us of our knowledge of this, our trained judgment of exceptions. In the case of the meaning-statement  $N_1$ , we know how to evaluate the import of the statement, not as a universal statement about all actual usage of the terms referred to, but as a statement about specially favored kinds of usage, i.e., we know what counts as an exception; similarly with the rule-statement, the ethical statements, and finally  $N_3$ — $N_6$ . (With  $N_7$ — $N_{10}$ , we leave the truisms and become less confident about dependent explanations.) When we read the statement about the behavior of Orthodox Jews on the Day of Atonement, we do not take it to be falsified (or disconfirmed) by discovering a devout but seriously ill Orthodox Jew who is granted rabbinical dispensation to eat on such a day to save his life. Nor does this show him to be other than a strict Orthodox Jew; so the statement is not analytic. But, in the absence of knowledge that such special conditions applied, we would have a *prima-facie* case for reclassifying him; and this is the mark of the quasi-definitional normic statement.

Now if the exceptions were few in number and readily described, one could convert a normic statement into an exact generalization by listing them. Normic statements are useful where the system of exceptions, although perfectly comprehensible in the sense that one can learn how to judge their relevance, is exceedingly complex. We see immediately the analogy with—in fact, the normic character of—physical laws. The physicist's *training* makes him aware of the system of exceptions and inaccuracies, which, if simpler, could be put explicitly into the statement of scope. In fact, some of the grosser features are commonly incorporated in the statement of the scope of a law; interestingly enough, a study of laws reveals that occasionally an obviously normic (in fact, quasi-definitional) form is adopted, as when they are about *ideal* gases, or apply up to the *fatigue* point, or for *homogeneous* media, etc., where a large part of the procedure of telling whether a gas is ideal, a metal fatigued, etc., is to see whether the law applies. In such cases the law really amounts to a sophisticated "mnemonic device," that awful epithet with which Hempel labels the procedure of the *verstehen* and empathy theorists! The study of behavior, history, or the

social sciences makes us aware of (develops our skill in recognizing) the exceptions to the truisms or, more generally, the normic statements which serve the role analogous to laws in these fields. We do not go around decrying all physical laws as false (although they are not exactly true) because they serve the crucial explanatory role of singling out a preferred value from which, it is alleged, all deviations can be explained. There is indeed a conventional element here in the sense that we have to judge between competing systems of norms by judging the simplicity, etc., of the explanations of deviations from them. But there is also a very substantial empirical element.

Essentially, a causal explanation of an individual occurrence must use normic role-justifying grounds because (a) there aren't any true universal hypotheses to speak of and (b) statistical statements are too weak—they abandon the hold on the individual case. The normic statement tells one what had to happen in *this* case, unless certain exceptional circumstances obtained; and the historical judgment is made (and open to verification) that these circumstances did not obtain. An event can rattle around inside a network of statistical laws, but is located and explained by being so located in the normic network. Not with mathematical exactitude, indeed, nor beyond all possibility of error, but often as exactly and certainly as our observations are exact and certain.

Looking back to the explanation of William's non-invasion of Scotland we can see this analysis in application.

The failure to invade takes place in a situation about which we know enough to make certain truisms relevant. Specifically, we see a man who seems to have even more reason for invading Scotland than he did for invading England (for Scotland unconquered was more of a threat to England than ever England was to William before he invaded her). It is a truism that a reasonable man with better reasons for doing something than he had when he previously did it will do it again; it is a truism that preventing attack is a good reason for invasion when victory is certain without too much fighting and moral considerations are not too highly regarded. We judge he is a man to whom such reasons were apparent, and for whom they would be weighty. Yet he does not invade. The *need* for an explanation is thrust on us by the system of normic statements; my analysis thus makes clear why we find ourselves in the odd position of explaining why something did *not* happen, one of the points of this example. Now, there are several ways in which the matter might be explained. There may be an error of fact in our understanding of the situation which removes the pressure of the truisms; there may be further facts which feed into and hence alter the expectations from the same still relevant truisms—constituting grounds for an allowable exception, or grounds for modifying our judgment of the presence of "enough" incentive, "too much" fighting, etc. In the present case, we discover further facts which refute our preliminary conclusion that the same reasons applied to the invasion of Scotland (*viz.*, that William now had ample land for his supporters), and we also discover that he subjugated Malcolm without actually invading his land. The first

makes the truism about reasonable men with *better* reasons inapplicable; the second provides a standard exception to the truism about the reasonableness of protective invasion which jointly provides the pressure for explanation. Neither truism is literally a universal truth, neither is statistical; the utility of both lies not in their form but in the possibility of learning how to apply them by training the judgment. Even this formulation is too kind; for indeed it is the judgment which precedes the formula, and the issues are not fought over the truism but over the particular explanations which it reflects but does not support.

3.5. *Predictions.* I shall here only mention what seem to me the more obvious reasons for abandoning the idea that explanations and predictions are complementary in the sense argued by Hempel. ("... an explanation ... is not complete unless it might as well have functioned as a prediction..."<sup>13</sup>) First, there are the non-causal explanations involving explanations of significance, symbolism, etc., from which no predictions follow at all. Second, there are the cases where we have a universal hypothesis which we can use for highly reliable prediction, e.g., that the appearance of sun-spots is followed by widespread radio disturbance; it certainly does not follow from our ability to predict here that we have an *explanation* of what we predict—sun-spots may be a complete mystery except for this regular correlation. Third, there are clearly cases where our inability to predict a future event in no way counts against the certainty with which we can explain one of its consequences in terms of it. Thus we could never have predicted the Lisbon earthquake, but it is absurd to question our explanation of the wreckage and misery in terms of the virtually simultaneous earthquake. This is, in some empty sense of "prediction," compatible with the deductive model's claims; but it brings home that some of the essential limitations on prediction of historical events need not be reflected in any limitations on their explanation. Here we could never have predicted the wreckage and misery, *until the* (simultaneous) *earthquake*, i.e., no prediction worth the name was possible; but the utility of explanations is not judged by the time-interval between their formulation and the moment to which they refer.<sup>14</sup> Fourth, a more important and, I think, interesting point. There is a kind of limiting case of the last consideration which constitutes a serious drawback for the complementarity view. When, and only when, a man *has* murdered his wife, we know something about him of the very greatest value and without which we could not make a reliable prediction of the murder, even if we knew him to be tremendously jealous of her relations with another man: we know he is capable of murder. It is comparatively easy to find the motive for murder, i.e., to explain it, when we are very confident there is a motive and know there has been a murder. But it is very difficult to tell from information about a man's jealousy that he is so jealous that he *will* commit murder. It is this use of the neces-

13. Above, p. 348.

14. It is by no means only geological catastrophes that have historical consequences without being predictable. The rain that saved Washington from Howe, the conception of a child by a queen, the hard winter of the retreat from Moscow, the failure of a bomb, are other cases.

sary condition truism "There must be a motive for a murder," plus the limited list of possible motives, plus the evidence as to what obtained, that makes the explanation easier than the prediction. Similarly we can explain a Cabinet Minister's resignation in terms of his disagreement on policy, even though our knowledge of him and of the issue could not in advance have entitled us to predict it with any reliability. The change in our information about him is our knowledge that he committed (and hence was capable of, i.e., had a certain character) the act we have to explain; hence we have more *data* for explaining than we did for predicting. Hence the former may be certain and the latter not: but not vice versa. This possibility is easily overlooked in physics because the increment of information arising from the event's occurrence is usually negligible in comparison with that on which laws are based. But it occurs there, and especially in astronomy (dealing with the explosions of stars which reveal their composition only as they die).

A much more important reason why this point has been overlooked is because it is thought to lead only to trivial "explanations" of the form, "He did it because he was capable of it." But explanations *based on truisms* are not trivial explanations, for they may be selection-explanations of the greatest value. "He drank the wine because he was thirsty" is as good an explanation, when empirically supported, as is "He drank because there was a gun in his back" or "He drank because he was nervous," etc., just because only one of these can be true and selecting one is informative because it rules the others out. "He killed her from jealousy" can most easily be supported if we have evidence that he could, for whatever reason, get to the point of murder (and this we have only after his action), plus evidence that he was motivated by jealousy (which we have before his action), plus truisms. This is a non-trivial explanation, but its ingredients preclude its conversion into a prediction of the event in question (for which it is too late) or of future ones (for which it is irrelevant, since a previous murder is not good grounds for expecting another, nor for not expecting it). There may perhaps seem to be some residual logical sense in which the explanation, once given, could serve as a prediction, but it is of no more importance than the sense in which laws are involved in particular statements. For a prediction is by definition such that it *could* be given before the event, but these predictions, requiring data from the event, logically could not be given before it. I believe this point accounts for a crucial advantage of history and constitutes a crucial rebuttal of the suggestion that history is incomplete until it has predictively useful laws.

3.6. *Other Models of Explanation.* Perhaps one can only break the hold of a logical model by persisting with one alternative; but I have here elected to multiply the alternatives in the hope that their diversity may open up at least one fruitful way of dealing with the difficulties which I have no doubt overlooked in each of them. In conclusion I want to mention two radically different models or analogies as a final attempt to shake loose our thought from the cast in which it is set by the interesting but, I think, unsound analysis of the deductive model.

An illuminating comparison can be found between many historical explanations and straightforward procedures such as explaining the way to a certain place (cf. explaining the northward spread of Gothic cathedral architecture or explaining how the scientific revolution developed in Europe). But the most interesting analogy of all, perhaps, is to be found between explanatory narrative in history and the development of the dramatic plot in a play or novel. Literary critics have often written of the criterion of "inevitability": it is said that a good play must develop in such a way that we are surprised at each development, i.e., cannot predict it, but then see the development as necessary, i.e., can explain it. Since I have been arguing that in history prediction is usually difficult or impossible but explanation often good and sometimes certain, it seems worth examining the comparison. We can begin by eliminating the exaggerations. First, even in good plays it is too much to require that prediction is always impossible; it is rather that frequent and/or important, interesting developments take place. Correspondingly, there are many predictions that we can make about behavior (and consequently about future history or future discoveries about past history), some of them with the greatest confidence.<sup>15</sup> Second, it is also too much to claim that *no* changes in the plot or character development are possible, since even large changes if made earlier (with the appropriate later changes) must be possible. After all, the early part of the play constitutes the only foundations on which one can *base* judgments of inevitability thereafter, the plot not being inevitable before the first line is written. So in history, given the data we have up to a certain point, there are a number of possible subsequent turns of fortune, none of which would seem to us inexplicable. Is it not an inadequate sense of explanation which makes it possible to explain each of several alternatives (though not "anything that happens")? No; for to say that we can and would explain several different alternatives does not mean we would give the *same* explanation for each. In so far as the act itself is required for the explanation of the act, so far inevitability is only retrospective. Explanation is retrospective, prediction prospective; and the inevitability of determinism is explanatory rather than predictive. Hence freedom of choice, which is between future alternatives, is not incompatible with the existence of causes for every event. But this is to stray.

The *point* of the criterion of dramatic inevitability remains and is an excellent one; it is the necessity for *plausibility in depth*. The play must survive all analysis of its plausibility; there must not be an inconsistency between an earlier act by a character and a later that cannot be accounted

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15. Scullard has a nice example in which he commits himself in some detail to an account of what would have happened if. . . . This is logically of the same nature as "what will happen if . . ." and more common in history, since the historian is only in his spare time a prophet. "This view seems to imply that Flaminius, if superseded, would not have advocated peace (and betraying the Greeks) because the glory of enforcing such a peace would fall to another. But surely if he had successfully managed the acceptance of terms, he would have spiked the guns of his political opponents since the peace would have been recognized as that of the negotiator. . . ." *Roman Politics 220-150 B.C.* (Oxford, 1951), p. 103.

for by the intervening development. The play must be consistent with what we know or discover of human behavior. So, too, must historical explanation be plausible in depth, must survive analysis and further discoveries. But no more than the playwright must the historian be able to give the laws of behavior in order to give a plausible account. He is vulnerable to them, but does not seek them or require them (unlike the physicist—though not so unlike the automobile mechanic). What must be given by the playwright to make the plot's unfolding seem inevitable in retrospect is not unlike what must be found and given by the historian to make his narrative explanatory. This we can do; but we would have to go beyond the bounds of historical data and interests, to abandon history, if we sought to eliminate all surprise. Our records of the past and present make it quite certain that to abandon historical explanations for this goal is to abandon the only relevant, and an entirely satisfactory approach, for a hope which is as misguided as, if no less interesting than, the hope for an aesthetic computer that will eliminate the necessity for any judgments of artistic merit.

Historical explanations are secure against the depredations of future scientific discoveries just as much as any scientific explanations are, law-based or not. The reason is that they are based on extremely reliable knowledge of behavior, despite its being usually too well known to be worth mentioning, and too complex to permit any precise formulation. It is a central error to suppose with Hempel that scientific laws are either more accurate or more useful than truisms as grounds for historical explanation. But Boswell was too modest when he said: "Great abilities are not requisite for an Historian; for in historical composition all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent. He has facts ready to his hand; so there is no exercise of invention. Imagination is not required in any high degree; only about as much as is used in the lower kinds of poetry. Some penetration, accuracy, and colouring will fit a man for the task, if he can give the application which is necessary" (*Life of Johnson* [Oxford], Vol. I, p. 284). To get the facts ready to one's hand, to avoid invention in reporting them, to penetrate their meaning and illuminate their presentation—it might well be said that these *are* tasks to tax the greatest powers of the human mind.

## APPENDIX

### THE PURELY LOGICAL ARGUMENTS FOR THE NECESSITY OF LAWS

We shall now enter briefly into a number of points connected with the main issue discussed above. Their full development would require a much more extensive treatment than we can give them here, but they provide the support or development of certain points in 3.1 and 3.2 which seems to me too crucial to be wholly omitted.



First then, I wish to dispose of two arguments sometimes felt to establish the absolute necessity for supposing laws of the Hempelian kind to underlie our explanations. The occupational hazard for any such argument was brought out earlier; it is likely to be self-defeating if it becomes too general, since it then obliterates the distinction between explanations and, e.g., descriptions. In any sense in which laws underlie descriptions, they do not constitute part of a logical analysis of explanations as a distinct category of discourse. Take the view that laws underlie ("are involved in") explanations because any working language presupposes regularities (since communication requires constancies of meanings, and these require constancies of reference, i.e., regularities in the world). This does not show that laws are involved in explanations in any way they are not involved in particular statements, and it is certainly of the greatest irrelevance to tell a historian that his statements about the number of pottery shards he has discovered at the Acropolis excavations "really" involve laws (e.g., about the continued existence of something which can be called "the Acropolis") and would be "more completely formulated" if these were explicitly stated. This is an entirely misleading sense of "involves," a trivial, irrelevant sense, and if this is the only sense in which explanations involve laws we can ignore it. In certain highly abnormal contexts (e.g., where our sight begins to fail us but we haven't yet realized it), some of these regularity-presuppositions of ordinary descriptive talk may be at issue and have to be uncovered. But in virtually every ordinary case (and necessarily, since language could otherwise never operate effectively for communication) both description and explanation are complete without laws and cannot be made *more* complete by giving the presupposed "laws" (they not only would be redundant, but cannot be formulated,<sup>16</sup> and are unnecessary either for verification purposes or for understanding). The difference between them is the element of understanding, of which the one has, of its nature, to be the bearer.

Look now at the supposedly Humean argument, which at least avoids the possibility of a simple *reductio ad absurdum* move such as we have just employed. At best, it only applies to causal explanations and hence not to all historical explanations. But it does not apply to all descriptive statements and this saves it from the death by excess. What can it mean to offer something, C, as the cause of something else, E? That C is a cause of E as well as being an event of a certain describable kind cannot be discovered by examining C *alone*. It appears to be an inference of a more complicated kind from C's *relation* to other events, including E; in fact, it is argued, the causal assertion can only mean that C's are *constantly conjoined* with E's. Here is the regularity, law, or universal hypothesis, which is supposed to be involved in the causal assertion. It is part of the

16. More exactly, cannot be formulated in a way that would make them of any use as a justification or amplification. They can be formulated as truisms; but then, as the name implies, the point of producing them is lost. Except, perhaps as a reminder, as when we say, "Well, people *have* been known to act unselfishly, you know." "Well, being greedy and confident *does* provide enough motive for undertaking some hazards." "When invasions offer no prospect of gain, invaders *tend* not to undertake them."

meaning of "cause." I think that an oversight on the part of Hume and, so far as I can see, his successors (certainly Russell and Hempel), vitiates this argument entirely. (But it may well be that a more serious one vitiates this criticism!) I shall argue that the only sense in which they are correct is one which involves an absurd sense of "law."

Their argument is strongest at the general level, for as we take specific uses of "cause" we find their analysis of this term to be faulty. Assume that part of their analysis to be correct; then the form of their argument goes thus:

"You say that C caused E, but that you do not think any general causal law is involved. But surely you cannot mean that C caused E just on *this* occasion, and that something *exactly like* C would not bring about something exactly like E on another occasion. If you did mean this, what is it about this occasion that entitles you to distinguish the two occasions, to say that *here alone* C causes E? Whatever it is, it should be included in the description of C, since it is a causally relevant condition; and then you will no longer have any grounds for rejecting the general law asserting that C's (as now described) always produces E's."

To this, one can reply very directly:

"It is not clear what can be meant by '*exactly like*.' If it means 'alike in all features I can at the moment describe,' then I can certainly reject the generalization, for there may well be features of this C which are of great causal importance, and which I have taken into account in forming my judgment that C produced E, but which I may not be very good at formulating exactly—just as the experienced helmsman can with extreme reliability identify the cause of a yacht's defeat as sailing too close to the wind, but be quite unable to formulate a general law of which this case could be shown to be an instance. There is no necessary connection between reliability in identifying causes and reliability in formulating laws; and as a historian, one need have no interest in, and no faith in the future of, the search for gross laws of human behavior.

"On the other hand, perhaps by '*exactly like*' you meant 'alike in every respect, presently describable or not.' Then I reject the generalization on the grounds that it has no generality. For the assertion that the explanation of the occurrence of the scientific revolution in Western rather than Eastern Europe was the devastation of the Eastern Empire by the barbarians coupled with the genius of Galileo, cannot be generalized in such a way as to say the generalization has ever been found to be true before or since. So my (justifiable) confidence in the explanation has nothing to do with any belief in this 'generalization.'"

There are two possible defenses here. First it might be said that, even if the explanation's strength cannot be increased by production of such a law—hitherto unconfirmed—yet the explanation logically requires one to assert such a law. Unfortunately, the argument is wrong not only pragmatically but logically; for even if a belief in some law is required for the assertion that C causes E, it need not be a law that C's cause E's. It may be a law in which the time occurs; so that the effect said to be produced

by C's varies with time, ranging from E's (at this particular time) to F's (at a later time) to C's, etc. Such a law would perfectly support prediction and causation and could be inferred from available data; it is in fact a good model for development laws about the changing responses of an individual as he learns from experience. If any laws are found in history, they may well be of this kind; and there is therefore no contradiction at all between saying that C caused E (now) and denying that C's cause E's in general, i.e., that any Hempelian kind of law is involved. The laws that psychologists seek in learning studies are *not* of this kind. They *are* intended to have multiple instances—all organisms, all mammals, all white rats, all white rats of a certain strain. The narrowing down can be continued without loss of interest, though the kind of interest comes nearer and nearer to the interest of the historian than the psychologist, up to the point where we have a law about the behavior of a single individual. And some of these can have a fully causal form without in any way involving the assertion that more than one similar action will *or could* be covered. If you like, we can still talk of a generalization here, but it is one in which the instances are different. So there is no need for the kind of generalization that Hempel defines as a "universal hypothesis" at all, neither a practical nor a logical need.

One cannot include the time in the description of C because C is, in Hempel's words, "a . . . kind of event," and two events cannot be said to be of a different *kind* simply because one occurs later than another. (A similar distinction could be made in terms of space; and the result of accepting them would be the view that each event defines a kind of event, i.e., the laws connecting them may have only single instances, i.e., are not laws, since laws *necessarily* have generality in the sense that it is *logically possible* for them to apply to more than one event. Hence for "kind of event" to make sense it cannot include reference to space-time location as such.) It is true that the above discussion rules out Hempelian laws by showing that a more general kind meets Hume's requirement. But the time-dependent laws also ruin the *point* of Hume's argument, since we clearly can not give them and clearly *do* have causal judgments that are beyond reasonable doubt (think of the ink-stain example). The challenge to justify such judgments hence does not require the giving of *kinds* of event C and E, which are here instantiated and in general related; and the remaining Humean requirement—that there *be* such laws—can certainly not be disproved, but has no effect on the procedure of identifying and verifying causal claims.

Perhaps one still feels that an element of universality remains. Surely to say C causes E *logically* commits one to the view that anything identical to C in every respect *including the time* will produce something similarly identical to E. Here indeed we reach agreement—but not significance. For it is *logically impossible* that there could be more than one thing satisfying this requirement, and to talk of a generalization which cannot possibly have more than one instance is really to abuse the concept. A particularly unattractive feature of this piece of logical legerdemain is that

it converts the most highly individual statement into a generalization; for to say "Lord Haldane suggested to the Coal Commission that the spirit of devoted service characteristic of the professional military services would be an excellent ideal for the state-owned civilian enterprises"<sup>17</sup> is to say that Lord Haldane and everyone exactly identical to him suggested . . . i.e., to produce a "generalization" or "law" or "universal hypothesis" in the sense used above. This is clearly an entirely trivial manoeuvre. A generalization must have more than one possible instance; a particular statement is no less particular because it applies to "everything" logically identical to its subject.

I believe that it has been the spell of some of these "logical" arguments, not too explicitly considered, which has given so much appearance of necessity to the deductive model. I hope the above discussion demonstrates that each strand of the spell is faulty and that the whole provides no support for Hempel's analysis, nor for any plausible modification of it.

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17. R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 220.

# History and the Social Sciences

## MAURICE MANDELBAUM

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MAURICE MANDELBAUM was born in 1908. He taught philosophy at Swarthmore College from 1934 to 1947 and at Dartmouth College from 1947 to 1957. He was recently appointed Professor of Philosophy at the Johns Hopkins University. His publications include: *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (1938), *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (1955), and numerous contributions to philosophical journals.

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### Societal Facts\*

I. *Introduction.* If one adopts Broad's distinction between critical and speculative philosophy, the following paper may be regarded as an attempt to deal with one of the major problems of a critical philosophy of the social sciences. Like all such attempts, this paper faces some difficulties which are not encountered in equally acute form by those who deal with the concepts and methods of natural sciences. In the first place, the concepts and methods utilized in the natural sciences have been more sharply defined than have been those which social scientists employ. In the second place, there is less disagreement among natural scientists than among social

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scientists as to the purposes which actually do underlie, or which should underlie, their studies. In the third place, the relations among the various branches of natural science seem to be more easily definable and less subject to dispute than is the case among the social sciences. It is with one aspect of the relations among the various social sciences that this paper will be concerned.

There can scarcely be any doubt that there is at present a considerable measure of disagreement among social scientists concerning the relations which obtain among their various disciplines. For example, there is little agreement as to how the province of "social psychology" is related to general psychology on the one hand or to sociology on the other. There is perhaps even less agreement as to how sociology and history are related, or whether, in fact, history is itself a social science. Even the province of cultural anthropology which, in its earlier stages, seemed to be capable of clear definition, is now in a position in which its relations to the other fields of social science have become extremely fluid. This type of fluidity in the boundaries of the various social sciences, and the ease with which concepts employed in one discipline spread to other disciplines, has been quite generally regarded as a promising augury for the future of the social sciences. One notes the frequency with which "integration" is held up as an important programmatic goal for social scientists. But such pleas for integration are ambiguous. On the one hand, they may merely signify a recognition of the fact that attempts to understand some concrete problems call for co-operation between persons trained to use the concepts and methods of different social sciences, or that workers in one discipline should be aware of the methods and results of those who work in other fields. On the other hand, what some who plead for "integration" in social science seem to demand is that the various disciplines should merge into one larger whole. On such a view the goal of integration would be the achievement of a state in which all persons who work in the field of social science would operate with the same set of concepts and would utilize the same methods of inquiry. If I am not mistaken, it is sometimes assumed that the social sciences will have made their greatest advance when the individual social sciences which now exist will have lost their separate identities. In so far as this paper has a practical purpose, its purpose is to indicate that "integration," taken in this sense, is a mistaken goal for sociologists and psychologists to pursue.<sup>1</sup>

In stating that I wish to argue against what some social scientists believe to be the most promising path which their sciences can follow, it is clear that this paper has what might be termed an injunctive character. I am attempting to rule in advance that certain modes of procedure should or should not be adopted by practicing social scientists. To those trained in the critical philosophy of the natural sciences, such a procedure will doubtless seem both foolhardy and perverse. Yet, it is unavoidable. So long as there are fundamental differences among social scientists with respect to the types of concepts and types of method which they actually use, and

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1. In this paper I shall not be concerned with the other social sciences.

so long as the criteria by means of which they measure the adequacy of these concepts and methods differ, every attempt to do more than compile a *corpus* of materials for comparison, will involve that the analyst of the social sciences should take his own stand with respect to the matters under debate. Where one can show reasons for the position adopted, the injunctive element in one's analyses cannot be claimed to be wholly arbitrary. It is in proportion to the strength of these reasons that any particular injunctive proposal is to be judged.

However, any proposal as to the relations which ought to obtain between two or more social sciences will presuppose a belief as to what the goal of the social sciences may be. Concerning this topic there is also a considerable amount of debate. However, I believe it possible to formulate a general statement which might be acceptable to all, leaving unprejudiced those specific issues which have divided social scientists into opposed camps. I submit that the following statement would be quite generally acceptable: it is the task of the social sciences to attain a body of knowledge on the basis of which the actions of human beings as members of a society can be understood. This definition of the aim of the social sciences does not rule out the possibility that an understanding of the actions of human beings as members of a society may be instrumental to some further aim, such as that of attaining the means of controlling human behavior, or of promoting human welfare. (Nor, of course, does it affirm that is the case.) Furthermore, it is to be noted that in this statement of the aims of the social sciences I have avoided prejudging this issue as to whether the body of knowledge which is sought can be formulated as a system of laws, and whether an understanding of human actions is equivalent to explaining these actions in the sense in which the term "explanation" is used in the natural sciences. Throughout this paper I wish to avoid raising these questions, and in so far as possible I shall confine my discussion to a neutral terminology which does not prejudice any of these issues. Wherever my language seems to suggest that I am using the model of explanation used in the natural sciences, my point could equally well be phrased in terms which are compatible with the view that the methods and concepts of the social sciences are utterly different from those employed in the natural sciences. And, conversely, where I use the language of "understanding," my discussion can equally well be rephrased in terms of the language of "scientific explanation."

Having now defined what I take to be the task of the social sciences, I can state the aim of this paper. My aim is to show that one cannot understand the actions of human beings as members of a society unless one assumes that there is a group of facts which I shall term "societal facts" which are as ultimate as are those facts which are "psychological" in character. In speaking of "societal facts" I refer to any facts concerning the forms of organization present in a society. In speaking of "psychological facts" I refer to any facts concerning the thoughts and the actions of specific human beings.

II. *An Example of the Irreducibility of Societal Concepts.* If it be the

case, as I wish to claim, that societal facts are as ultimate as are psychological facts, then those concepts which are used to refer to the forms of organization of a society cannot be reduced without remainder to concepts which only refer to the thoughts and actions of specific individuals.<sup>2</sup> There are many reasons why the type of claim that I am putting forward has been doubted, and we shall note some of these reasons as we proceed. First, however, it will be well to lend some plausibility to the view by means of an example.

Suppose that I enter a bank, I then take a withdrawal slip and fill it out, I walk to a teller's window, I hand in my slip, he gives me money, I leave the bank and go on my way. Now suppose that you have been observing my actions and that you are accompanied by, let us say, a Trobriand Islander. If you wished to explain my behavior, how would you proceed? You could explain the filling out of the withdrawal slip as a means which will lead to the teller's behavior towards me, that is, as a means to his handing me some notes and coins; and you could explain the whole sequence of my action as directed towards this particular end. You could then explain the significance which I attached to the possession of these notes and coins by following me and noting how the possession of them led other persons, such as assistants in shops, to give me goods because I gave them the notes and coins which the bank teller had handed to me. Such would be an explanation of my observed behavior in terms of the behavior of other specific individuals towards me. And it might at first glance appear as if an explanation couched in terms of these interpersonal forms of behavior would be adequate to cover all of the aspects of the case.

However, it would also be necessary for you to inform the stranger who accompanies you that it does not suffice for a person to fill out such a slip and hand it to just anyone he may happen to meet. It would also be only fair to inform him that before one can expect a bank teller to hand one money in exchange for a slip, one must have "deposited" money. In short, one must explain at least the rudiments of a banking system to him. In doing so one is, of course, using concepts which refer to one aspect of the institutional organization of our society, and this is precisely the point which I wish to make. (And the same point can be made with reference to how Malinowski has explained to us the Trobriand Islanders' system of ceremonial exchanges of gifts.) In all cases of this sort, the actual behavior of specific individuals towards one another is unintelligible unless one views their behavior in terms of their status and roles, and the concepts of status and role are devoid of meaning unless one interprets them in terms of the organization of the society to which the individuals belong.

To this it may be objected that any statement concerning the status of an individual is itself analyzable in terms of how specific individuals behave towards other individuals, and how these in turn behave towards

2. The term "ultimate" may, of course, have other meanings as well. In the present paper, however, I am taking the irreducibility of a set of concepts to be equivalent to the ultimacy of that set of facts to which these concepts refer.



them. Thus it might be claimed that while the explanation of an individual's behavior often demands the introduction of concepts referring to "societal status," such concepts are themselves reducible to further statements concerning actual or probable forms of behavior. Thus, societal concepts might be held to be heuristic devices, summarizing repeated patterns of behavior, but they would be nothing more: their real meaning would lie in a conjunction of statements concerning the behavior of a number of individuals.

However, this view is open to serious objection. We have seen in the foregoing illustration that my own behavior towards the bank teller is determined by his status. If the attempt is now made to interpret his status in terms of the recurrent patterns of behavior which others exemplify in dealing with him, then *their* behavior is left unexplained: each of them—no less than I—will only behave in this way because each recognizes the teller of a bank to have a particular status. Similarly, it is impossible to resolve the bank teller's role into statements concerning his behavior towards other individuals. If one wished to equate his societal role with his reactions towards those who behave in a particular way towards him, it would be unintelligible that he should hand us money when we present him with a withdrawal slip when he stands in his teller's cage, and yet that he would certainly refuse to do so if we were to present him with such a slip when we met him at a party. Bank tellers as well as depositors behave as they do because they assume certain societally defined roles under specific sets of circumstances. This being the case, it is impossible to escape the use of societal concepts in attempting to understand some aspects of individual behavior: concepts involving the notions of status and role cannot themselves be reduced to a conjunction of statements in which these or other societal concepts do not appear.

[Precisely the same point may be made with respect to attempts to translate societal concepts into terms of the thoughts of individuals rather than into terms of their overt behavior. If one should wish to say that I acted as I did towards the teller because I foresaw that through my actions he would be led to give me money, one would still have to admit that my anticipation of his response was based upon my recognition of the fact that he was a bank teller, and that the role of a bank teller demands that he should act as the bank's agent, and the function of a bank (so far as each depositor is concerned) is that of being a custodian of legal tender, etc. etc. Thus, in attempting to analyze societal facts by means of appealing to the thoughts which guide an individual's conduct, some of the thoughts will themselves have societal referents, and societal concepts will therefore not have been expunged from our analysis.]

Now I do not wish to claim that an individual's thoughts or his overt actions are wholly explicable in terms of status and roles. Not only does it seem to be the case that some actions may be explained without introducing these concepts, but it is also the case that two individuals, say two bank tellers, may behave differently towards me in spite of the identity in their roles. Thus, one may be friendly and the other hostile or aloof, and the nature of my own behavior towards them will then differ. Thus it should

be apparent that I am not seeking to explain all facets of individual behavior by means of statements which only refer to societal facts. What I wish to contend is (a) that in understanding or explaining an individual's actions we must often refer to facts concerning the organization of the society in which he lives, and (b) that our statements concerning these societal facts are not reducible to a conjunction of statements concerning the actions of individuals. I take it that almost all social scientists and philosophers would grant the first of these contentions, but that many social scientists and most philosophers would reject the second, insisting that societal facts are reducible to a set of facts concerning individual behavior.

III. *The Criterion of "Irreducibility."* It is now necessary to state the criterion of irreducibility which the foregoing illustration has presupposed.

Let us assume that there is a language, *S*, in which sociological concepts such as "institutions," "mores," "ideologies," "status," "class," etc., appear. These concepts all refer to aspects of what we term "a society." That there is a language of this type is clear from the works of sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. It is also clear from the fact that we use such terms as "The President of the United States," or "the unmarried children of X." In order to define the meaning of the latter terms we must make reference to the Constitution of the United States, or to the laws which govern our marriage and kinship systems, and in these references we are employing societal concepts.

There is, of course, also another language, *P*, in which we refer to the thoughts and actions and capabilities of individual human beings. In making statements in this language (which, for want of a better name, I have called our "psychological language")<sup>3</sup> we are not using societal concepts. The differences between these two languages may be illustrated by the fact that the connotation of the term "The present President of the United States" carries implications which do not follow from the personal name "Dwight D. Eisenhower," and statements concerning the personality of Dwight D. Eisenhower carry no implications for our understanding of his societal role. This remains true even though we admit that in this case, as in most others, the status of an individual is often causally connected with the nature of his personality, and even though we also admit that an individual's personality is often connected with the fact that he occupies a particular status, or that he functions within this status as he does.

Put in these terms, my thesis that societal facts are irreducible to psychological facts may be reformulated as holding that sociological concepts

3. It will be noted that what I have termed our psychological language does not include terms such as "neural paths," "brain-traces," etc. My argument aims to show that societal facts are not reducible to facts concerning the thoughts and actions of specific individuals; the problem of whether both societal facts and facts concerning an individual's thoughts and actions are explicable in terms of (or, are in some sense "reducible" to) a set of physical or physiological correlates is not my present concern. It will readily be seen that this is not the point at issue. Those who seek to reduce societal facts to facts concerning individual behavior are not attempting to speak in physical and physiological terms.

cannot be translated into psychological concepts *without remainder*. What is signified by the stipulation "without remainder" must now be made clear.

It would seem to be the case that all statements in the sociological language, *S*, are translatable into statements concerning the behavior of specific individuals, and thus would be translatable into the language *P*. For example, a statement such as "The institution of monogamous marriage supplanted the polygynous marriage system of the Mormons" could presumably be translated into statements concerning the actions of certain aggregates of individuals. However, it is by no means certain that such translations could be effected without using other concepts which appear in the sociological language. These concepts too might have their translations into *P*, but the translation of the concepts of *S* into *P* would not be complete if such translations still had to employ other concepts which appear in *S*. It is with respect to incomplete translations of this type that I speak of translations which cannot be effected "without remainder."

An analogue of this situation was pointed out by Chisholm in his criticism of C. I. Lewis's theory of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> According to Chisholm, thing-statements cannot be completely reduced to statements concerning sense-data because one must specify the conditions of the appearance of these sense-data, and in doing so one must again use thing-statements. And this is precisely the situation which we found to obtain in our illustration of the behavior of a person withdrawing money from a bank.

Now, it might be argued (as it has sometimes been argued with respect to Chisholm's contention) that our inability to carry out such translations, without remainder, represents a practical and not a theoretical inability. According to those who take this view, the practical difficulty which is present arises from the indefinitely long conjunction of statements which we should have to make in carrying out our analyses, and to the fact that some of these statements would involve a foreknowledge of future events. But it is claimed that no theoretically important consequences follow from our inability to complete a detailed analysis of a particular statement: such partial analyses as we can actually make may not have omitted any theoretically significant aspects of the statements which we wish to analyze. Such a rejoinder would be open to two objections, so far as our present discussion is concerned.

First, we are here concerned with the problem of the relations between two empirical disciplines. Therefore, if it be admitted that it is impossible in practice to reduce statements which contain societal terms to a conjunction of statements which only include terms referring to the thoughts and actions of specific individuals, the rejoinder in question might conceivably be significant from the point of view of a general ontology, but it would not affect my argument regarding the autonomy of the societal sciences.

Second, it is to be noted that whatever may be the case regarding Chisholm's argument concerning the relation of sense-data statements to

4. Cf. Chisholm, "The Problem of Empiricism" in *Journal of Philosophy*, V, 45 (1948), pp. 512 ff. (I am indebted to Roderick Firth for calling my attention to this analogue.)

thing-statements, the problem of reducing statements which include societal terms to statements which only concern specific individuals is not merely a question of how we may *analyze* action statements, but how we may *explain* certain facts. It has been my contention that if we are to explain an individual's behavior when, say, he enters a bank, we must have recourse to societal concepts and cannot merely employ terms which refer to the fact that this individual makes marks on paper, approaches a specific point, hands the marked paper to another individual, etc. etc. He who knew all of this, and who also knew all of the other actions performed by the members of a society, would possess a series of protocol statements, or biographical "logs." Even though this set of logs included reference to all of the actions performed by all of the members of the society, no societal concepts would appear in it. However, this information would not make it possible for our omniscient collector of data to explain why the depositor fills out a slip in order to withdraw money, or why the teller will exchange notes and coins for such a slip. Such a transaction only becomes explicable when we employ the concept of "a bank," and what it means to speak of "a bank" will involve the use of concepts such as "legal tender," and "contract." Further, what it means to speak of "a contract" will involve reference to our legal system, and the legal system itself cannot be defined in terms of individual behavior—even the legal realist must distinguish between the behavior of judges and policemen and the behavior of "just anyone." Thus, if we are to explain certain forms of individual behavior we must use societal concepts, and these concepts are not (I have argued) translatable without remainder into terms which only refer to the behavior of individuals.

Yet it is important to insist that even though societal concepts cannot be translated into psychological concepts without leaving this societal remainder, it is not only possible but is indeed necessary to make the *partial* translation. It is always necessary for us to translate terms such as "ideologies" or "banks" or "a monogamous marriage system" into the language of individual thought and action, for unless we do so we have no means of verifying any statements which we may make concerning these societal facts. Ideologies and banks and marriage systems do not exist unless there are aggregates of individuals who think and act in specific ways, and it is only by means of establishing the forms of their thoughts and their actions that we can apprehend the nature of the societal organization in which they live, or that we can corroborate or disallow statements concerning this organization. Yet, the necessity for this translation of specific sociological concepts into terms of individual behavior in order that we may verify and refine our sociological statements does not alter the fact that the possibility of making such a translation always involves the necessity for using other societal concepts to define the conditions under which this behavior takes place. Thus, the translation can never obviate the use of societal concepts and reduce the study of society to a branch of the study of the actions of individuals.

IV. *Objections.* In the foregoing discussion I have been at pains to state

my position in such a way as to avoid the most usual objections to the general type of view which I hold. However, it will be useful to comment on three objections which have frequently been raised against the view that societal facts are irreducible to psychological facts.<sup>5</sup>

The first of these objections may be termed the ontological objection. It consists in holding that societal facts cannot be said to have any status of their own since no such facts would exist if there were not individuals who thought and acted in specific ways. Now, to hold the view which I hold, one need not deny that the existence of a society presupposes the existence of individuals, and that these individuals must possess certain capacities for thought and for action if what we term a society is to exist. Yet, this admission does not entail the conclusion which is thought to follow from it: one need not hold that a society is an entity independent of all human beings in order to hold that societal facts are not reducible to the facts of individual behavior. The warrant for the latter position is merely this: all human beings are born into a society, and much of their thought and their action is influenced by the nature of the societies in which they live; therefore, those facts which concern the nature of their societies must be regarded as being independent of them. To be sure, these facts are not independent of the existence of *other* individuals, and it will be from the forms of behavior of these other individuals that any specific individual will have acquired his own societally oriented patterns of behavior. But these individuals, too, were born into an already functioning societal organization which was independent of them. Thus, their societally oriented behavior was also conditioned by an already existing set of societal facts, etc. etc.

To be sure, those who wish to press the ontological objection may insist that at some remote time in the history of the human race there were individuals who were not born into an already existing society, and that these individuals must have formed a societal organization by virtue of certain patterns of repeated interpersonal actions. Thus, they would seek to insist that all societal facts have their origins in individual behavior, and that it is mistaken to argue, as I have argued, that societal facts are irreducible to the facts of individual behavior. However, this rejoinder is clearly fallacious. Whatever may have been the origin of the first forms of societal organization (a question which no present knowledge puts us

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5. When we consider the type of "irreducibility" which has here been claimed to characterize societal facts, we must be prepared to allow that it may not be the only type of irreducibility to be found among "existential emergents." (On the meaning of this term, which has been borrowed from Lovejoy, cf. my "Note on Emergence," in *Freedom and Reason*, edited by Baron, Nagel, and Pinson; Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1951.) I am in fact inclined to believe that there is a stronger form of irreducibility than is here in question. This stronger form may be said to exist between, say, the color "red" and brain events or light frequencies. In such cases it might be true that even a *partial* translation cannot be effected. All that I have wished to show is that while it is undeniable that we can and do make partial translations of societal concepts by using psychological concepts, these translations cannot be complete: we must always use further societal concepts to specify the conditions under which the observed forms of societally oriented behavior take place.

in a position to answer), the issue with which we are here concerned is one which involves the nature of societies as they exist at present. To argue that the nature of present societal facts is reducible to the facts of individual behavior because the origins of a particular social system grew up out of certain repeated forms of behavior is a clear example of the geoeitic fallacy. One might as well argue on the basis of our knowledge of the origins of the Greek drama and of the modern drama that every current Broadway play is really to be understood as a religious festival.

However, the above answer to the ontological type of objection is clearly not sufficient.<sup>6</sup> It is, I hope, adequate to show that one usual form of countering my position is untenable; yet, the essential paradox remains. One can still legitimately ask what sort of ontological status societal facts can conceivably possess if it is affirmed that they depend for their existence on the activities of human beings and yet are claimed not to be identical with these activities. There are, it seems to me, two types of answer which might be given to this question. In the first type of answer one might contend that a whole is not equal to the sum of its parts, and a society is not equal to the sum of those individual activities which go to form it. This familiar holistic answer is not the one which I should be inclined to propose. In the first place, it is by no means certain that the principle of holism (as thus stated) is philosophically defensible. In the second place, such an answer assumes that what may be termed the "parts" of a society are to be taken to be individual human beings, and this is an assumption which I should be unwilling to make. All of the preceding argument entails the proposition that the "parts" of a society are specific societal facts, not individuals. If this were not the case, societal concepts could be translated into terms referring to individual behavior if we had sufficient knowledge of all the interrelations among these individuals. Instead, we have found that an analysis of a statement which concerns a societal fact will involve us in using other societal concepts: for example, that what it means to be a depositor in a bank will involve statements concerning our legal system and our monetary economy. Similarly, what it means to be a college student cannot be defined without recourse to statements concerning our educational system, and such statements cannot be analyzed without utilizing concepts which refer to statutory laws as well as to many other aspects of our societal organization. Thus, from the arguments which have been given, it follows that the "parts" of a society are not individual human beings, but are the specific institutions, and other forms of organization, which characterize that society. Once this is recognized, it remains an open question as to the extent to which any specific society (or all societies) are to be conceived holistically or pluralistically.

The second method of dealing with the ontological objection is the one which I should myself be inclined to adopt. It consists in holding that one set of facts may depend for its existence upon another set of facts and yet not be identical with the latter. An example of such a relationship

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6. In what follows I shall only be discussing human societies. The differences between "animal societies" and human societies are far more striking than are their similarities.

would be that which a traditional epiphenomenalist would regard as existing between brain events and the contents of consciousness. Whatever objections one may raise against the epiphenomenalist view of the mind-body relationship, one would scarcely be justified in holding that the position must be false because the content of consciousness could not be different from the nature of brain-states and yet be dependent upon the latter. If one has reasons for holding that the content of consciousness is different from brain-states, and if one also has reason for holding that it *does* depend upon the latter, one's ontology must be accommodated to these facts: the facts cannot be rejected because of a prior ontological commitment. And, without wishing to press my analogy farther than is warranted, I can point out that my statement concerning "the parts" of a society has its analogue in what those who hold to the epiphenomenalist position would say concerning the proper analysis of any statement referring to the content of an individual's field of consciousness. Just as I have claimed that the component parts of a society are the elements of its organization and are not the individuals without whom it would not exist, so the epiphenomenalist would (I assume) say that the parts of the individual's field of consciousness are to be found within the specific data of consciousness and not in the brain events upon which consciousness depends.

These remarks are, I hope, sufficient to dispel the ontological objection to the position which I wish to defend. To be sure, I have not attempted to say what position should be assigned to societal facts when one is constructing a general ontology. To do so, I should have to say much more concerning the nature of societal facts, and I should of course also have to discuss the nature of other types of entity. Here it has only been my concern to suggest that what I have termed the ontological objection to my thesis is by no means as strong as it may at first glance appear to be: the admission that all societal facts depend upon the existence of human beings who possess certain capacities for thought and for action by no means precludes the contention that these facts are irreducible to facts concerning those individuals.

The second of the most usual objections to the thesis that societal facts cannot be reduced to psychological facts is an epistemological objection. This objection may take many forms, depending upon the theory of knowledge which is held by the objector. However, the common core of all such objections is the indubitable fact that societal concepts are not capable of being "pointed to," in the sense in which we can point to material objects, or to the qualities or activities of these objects. Whenever we wish to point to any fact concerning societal organization we can only point to a sequence of interpersonal actions. Therefore, any theory of knowledge which demands that all empirically meaningful concepts must ultimately be reducible to data which can be directly inspected will lead to the insistence that all societal concepts are reducible to the patterns of individual behavior.

I shall not, of course, seek to disprove this general theory of knowledge.

Yet it is possible to indicate in very brief compass that it is inadequate to deal with societal facts. Since those who would hold this theory of knowledge would presumably wish to show that we can be said to know something of the nature of human societies, and since they would also wish to hold that our means of gaining this knowledge is through the observation of the repeated patterns of activities of individuals, a proof that their theory of knowledge cannot account for our apprehension of the nature of individual action is, in the present context, a sufficient disproof of the epistemological type of objection.

In order to offer such a disproof, let us revert to our illustration of a depositor withdrawing money from a bank. In order to understand his overt actions in entering a bank, filling out a slip, handing it to a teller, receiving notes and coins, and leaving the bank, we must view this sequence of actions as one internally connected series. Yet what connects the elements within the series is the person's intention to withdraw money from his account, and this intention is not itself a directly observable element within the series. Thus, unless it be admitted that we can have knowledge of aspects of human behavior which are not directly presented to the senses, we cannot understand his behavior and therefore cannot understand that which we seek to understand; i.e., those societal facts which supposedly are the summations of instances of behavior of this type. To this, it may of course be objected, that we have learned to attribute certain intentions to agents on the basis of our own experienced intentions, and when this introspective experience is combined with our observation of overt behavior we learn to interpret human actions. Yet if this enlargement of our modes of knowing is allowed, there is no reason to stop with the facts of individual behavior as the building-blocks of a knowledge of societal facts. Within our own experience we are no less directly aware of our own names, of our belonging to a particular family, of our status as youngsters or elders, etc., than we are of our own intentions. To be sure, our societal status must, originally, have been learned by us in a sense in which our intentions need not presumably have been learned. Yet, once again, we must avoid the genetic fallacy: the origin of our knowledge is not identical with that knowledge itself. Just as the concept of number has a meaning which need not be identical with the experiences through which it was learned, so the concept of a family, or of differentiated status due to age or sex, need not (even for a child) be identical with the experiences through which this concept was first made manifest. And to these remarks it should be added that once we have grasped the idea of status, or of family, or of authority, we can transfer this concept to situations which are initially alien to our own experience (e.g. to new forms of family organization) no less readily than we can apply a knowledge of our own intentions to the understanding of the intentions of those who act in ways which are initially strange to us. The problem of extending our knowledge from our own experience of others is not, I submit, more impossible in principle in the one case than in the other. And if this be so, there is no epistemological reason why we should seek to reduce societal



facts to the facts of individual behavior. Only if it were true that individual behavior could itself be understood in terms of the supposedly "hard data" of direct sensory inspection would there be any saving in the reduction of societal facts to facts concerning this behavior. But, as I have indicated, this is not the case.

The third type of objection to the view which I have been espousing is the objection that such a view interprets individual men as the pawns of society, devoid of initiative, devoid even of a common and socially-unconditioned nature, conceiving of them as mere parts of a self-existing social organism.<sup>7</sup> However, such a view I have in fact already rejected. To hold, as I have held, that societal facts are not reducible without remainder to facts concerning the thoughts and actions of specific individuals, is not to deny that the latter class of facts also exists, and that the two classes may interact. Those who have in the past held to the irreducibility of societal facts have, to be sure, often gone to the extreme of denying that there are any facts concerning individual behavior which are independent of societal facts. Such has not been my thesis. And it is perhaps worth suggesting that if we wish to understand many of the dilemmas by which individuals are faced, we can do no better than to hold to the view that there are societal facts which exercise external constraints over individuals no less than there are facts concerning individual volition which often come into conflict with these constraints.

## ERNEST GELLNER

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7. It is to be noted that some societally oriented behavior is only intelligible when interpreted with respect to *both* a societal concept and an individual's intention (e.g. in our case of a person withdrawing money from a bank). However, other instances of societally oriented behavior (e.g. customary observances of age and sex differences) do not involve a consideration of the agent's intentions.

## Holism versus Individualism in History and Sociology\*

The problem of explanation in history is also the problem of the nature of sociology. The views adopted in this field are held to have profound moral and political implications. We have recently often been reminded of this. The simplest argument connecting a premiss about the nature of historical explanation with political or ethical consequences runs as follows: if rigid, unchangeable, and wide-ranging generalisations are attainable with regard to historical processes, then an outlook which presupposes individual responsibility is basically misguided. Having pointed out this implication, philosophers hostile to the conclusion then devote themselves to undermining the premiss. They may do so either by pointing out that the required historical laws have not been found, or by arguing that they could not be.

I shall not directly concern myself with this matter of the existence or possibility of historical laws, but attempt to isolate the issues which arise here that can be stated without at any rate explicit reference to the law-like nature of history. I shall concern myself with the kind of concept or term characteristically employed when we talk of history or of societies. Notoriously the grammatical subject of sentences written or uttered by social scientists is often not a man, or enumerated or characterized men, but groups, institutions, "cultures," etc. The proper study of mankind is human groups and institutions.

Thus the alleged argument leading to the elimination of individual autonomy and responsibility may be stated without at least explicit and obvious presupposition of the attainment of causal generalizations in history. Those concerned with defending humanity against historicist or other mythologies—I shall call these defenders "Individualists"—notice this fact. This gives rise to an attempt to "eliminate" so-called "holistic" concepts, or rather to show that these are in principle eliminable. That such an elimination should be possible seems strongly suggested by the fact that, after all, groups consist of people, and institutions are what people do, etc. A state cannot exist without citizens, nor a legal system without judges, litigants, etc. The worst obstacle such elimination could encounter, it seems, would be complexity.<sup>1</sup>

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1. There is one foreseeable objection to both my arguments and those I criticize, namely, that a "naming" theory of meaning underlies both the approaches contemplated. For instance, Mr. R. Wollheim in his review of Mr. Weldon's "Vocabulary of Politics" in *Mind*, 1955, makes a point of this kind in a similar context. Now this type of currently fashionable general appeal to the heterogeneity of meaning does not seem to me to cut much ice; perhaps because the "naming theory" of meaning has not been adequately exorcized from my mind, but perhaps for better reasons. These might be along the

The matter, however, is not so simple. Arguments have been put forward to the effect that the elimination is in principle impossible.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is a weighty fact that at least some explanations in social sciences would in practice not be stated or be at all easily statable in Individualist terms.<sup>3</sup>

To each side in this dispute, its own position appears very nearly self-evident, and the opponents' position something that can be *said*, but not seriously practised. To the Individualist, his own position appears so true that it barely needs the confirmation of actually carried out eliminations, whilst he gleefully points out that in practice the holist can and does only approach his institutions, etc., through what concrete people do, which seems to the Individualist a practical demonstration and implicit confession of the absurdity of holism. By contrast (and with neat symmetry) the holist sees in the fact that the individualist continues to talk in holistic terms a practical demonstration of the unworkability of individualism, and he certainly does not consider the fact that he can only approach groups and institutions through the doings of individuals to be something which he had implicitly denied and which could count against him. Both sides find comfort in the actual practice of the opponent.

One should add here that the possibility of political implications cuts both ways. Individualists who attempt to save us, in the name of logic and liberty, from misconstruing our situation, are not wholly free at all times from the suspicion that a little propaganda for *laissez faire* is being hitched on to those very general issues.<sup>4</sup>

What is at issue is the ontological status of the entities referred to by the holistic terms. As the notion of ontological status is not as clear as it might be, I shall at some stages shift provisionally to something which is as important to the reductionist and which to him is an index of existence—namely, causation. He does not wish to allow that the Whole could ever

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following lines: not all reductions are impossible, but on the contrary some are both possible and salutary. The general acceptance of the great variety of ways in which words have meaning does indeed leave us with the baby, but also with much undesirable bath water. It does not by itself give us any insight into how various concepts are used. We gain that, amongst other ways, by trying to reduce some concepts to others. For instance, the Individualist is quite right in insisting that a rising marriage rate is not the kind of thing which could be the cause of an individual marriage. It only records the fact that more such marriages occur. At the same time when reductions fail, the fact that they do and the reasons why they do, give us some understanding of the nature of the unreduced concepts.

2. Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, "Societal Facts" in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1955, reprinted in this volume, p. 476.

3. Cf. M. Ginsberg, "The Individual and Society" in *The Diversity of Morals*, 1956.

4. As Ginsberg says: "Similarly those who refuse to accept methodological individualism . . . are not committed . . . to a totalitarian view of political action. They are well aware . . . of the dangers of concentrated power. But they deny that the only choice open to us is between a spontaneous competitive order on one hand, and a system of all-pervading control on the other. It is odd that those who attack what they call scientism should feel able to predict with certainty that any form of socialism must necessarily lead to cultural and political totalitarianism . . . In any event, 'logicism' is no improvement on 'scientism.'" *Op. cit.* pp. 161-2.

be a cause, and to insist that explanations which make it appear that it is can be translated into others. That which is a mere construct cannot causally affect that which "really exists"; this is, I suspect, the feeling of the Individualist, the reductionist. This, in conjunction with the truism that a whole is made up of its parts, that nothing can happen to a whole without something happening to either some at least of its parts or to their mutual relations,—leads him to the misleading conclusion that explanation in history and in social studies must ultimately be in terms of individual dispositions. The holistic counter-argument works in reverse; if something (*a*) is a causal factor and (*b*) cannot be reduced, then in some sense it "really and independently exists."

When we face a problem of "reduction" in philosophy we are often confronted with a dilemma; on the one hand forceful formal arguments tend to show that a reduction must be possible, on the other hand all attempted reductions fail or are incomplete, and features can be found which suggest or prove that they cannot succeed or be complete. For instance, phenomenism is supported not by the plausibility or success of actual reductions but by the force of the arguments to the effect that there must be a reduction, whilst at the same time the interesting arguments against it as cogently indicate that phenomenalist translation can never be completed.

The situation is similar with regard to the present problem. I consider, for instance, one particular, rather ambitious and interesting attempt to demonstrate that a reduction must be possible.

"All social phenomena are, directly or indirectly, human creations. A lump of matter may exist which no one has perceived but not a price which no one has charged, or a disciplinary code to which no one refers, or a tool which no one would dream of using. From this truism I infer the methodological principle . . . that the social scientist can continue searching for explanations of a social phenomenon until he has reduced it to *psychological terms*." (*italics mine*)

The conclusion reached in the end is:

"Individualistic ideal types of explanatory power are constructed by first discerning the form of typical . . . dispositions, and then by demonstration how these lead to certain principles of social behavior."<sup>5</sup>

As the argument also maintains that "individualistic ideal types" are alone possible, what the conclusion amounts to is something like this: to explain a social or historical situation is to deduce it from what the individuals involved in it are disposed to do.

This contention can be broken up into two claims; that an explanation specifies *individual* dispositions, and that it specifies individual *dispositions*. In other words: (1) Statements about things other than individuals are excluded from a final explanation; (2) Statements which are not about

5. J. W. N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation" in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. iii, no. 9, 1952. See also Discussion of his own paper by the same author in the following issue of the same *Journal*.

When in this paper I say "Individualism" I mean "methodological individualism," roughly along the lines outlined in those two articles.

dispositions are similarly excluded. By "disposition" here is meant something "intelligible," a conceivable reaction of human beings to circumstances; not necessarily one we share, still less necessarily one we can "introspect"; but still something opposed to what we would call "dead" physical causation where "anything could cause anything."

Having broken up the requirements of reduction into two parts, we get four possibilities, of which three are excluded. Let us consider these excluded ones in turn.

(1) Holistic subject plus intelligible disposition. This is equivalent to a "group mind" theory. I take it no one is advocating this seriously.

(2) Holistic subject without *intelligible* dispositions—i.e. attributions of regularity or pattern to wholes, without any suggestion that these patterns express conscious or purposive reactions.

(3) Individualistic subjects without *intelligible* dispositions. Let it be said that events explicable along the lines of alternative (3) can be excluded from history or sociology only by an inconvenient and arbitrary fiat. The destruction of Pompeii or the Black Death are historical events. It is true that the *reaction* of survivors to these "blindly causal" events calls for explanation not in terms of "dead" causation but possibly in terms of aims, dispositions, expectations, convictions. So be it; but the very fact that semi-deliberate and blindly causal events are so often and intimately fused in life brings out the inconvenience of excluding one kind.

Consider now exclusion of kind (2). When an historian speaks of the maintenance or growth of an institution, or a linguist about phonetic change, or an anthropologist about the maintenance of a system of kinship structure, they do not in fact always or often mention individual dispositions. The question is, *could* they?

The first step towards such a translation is easy. "The monarchy is strong" can be translated into a disposition of subjects to have a certain set of attitudes to the monarch. Note: not necessarily all subjects or all the time, but a sufficient number of them sufficiently often, and above all at crucial times. Neither "sufficient number" nor "sufficiently often" nor "crucial times" can be defined with precision, nor ultimately without referring back to the holistic term "monarchy." The same applies to the "set of attitudes."

By and large, institutions and social structures and climates of opinion are not the results of what people want and believe, but of what they take for granted. Let us allow the reductionist to class tacit acceptance amongst dispositions, though I suspect we shall find the same circularity here as occurs above. Such translations would, however, be clumsy, nebulous, long and vague, where the original statement about an institution or feature of the social scene was clear, brief and intelligible.

If, however, we grant that "in principle" this translation is possible, it in no way follows that these tacit and irregularly diffused dispositions are in turn explicable in terms of familiar, intelligible human responses. The existence of a diffused monarchical disposition was inferred logically from the truth of "The monarchy is strong"; the dependence of the latter state-

ment on the former, if it obtains at all, does so in virtue of logic or the truism that an institution is what people do. But the dependence of the perhaps validly inferred monarchial disposition in turn on a piece of intuitively obvious psychology would be a causal matter, and there are no reasons in logic or fact for supposing it to hold. On the contrary, in as far as such a procedure seems to assume the possibility of isolating more elementary dispositions "as they are prior to their manifestations in a social context," formal doubts may be raised concerning the realizability of such a program. Need all our numerous tacit dispositions, each to one of the many facets of our social environment, be—*all of them and necessarily*—by-products or modifications of some avowable aim or attitude? I doubt whether as much could be claimed for mine, unless at any rate some of them are brought under the residual and negative classifications of "passivity," "inertia," "imitativeness" and even "randomness"; and these dubious dispositions will fail to explain the specific modifications of my attitudes, being essentially only indications that really good explanations in terms of aim and information are not to be had.

There are two specific points, possibly inconclusive by themselves but worth noting, which influence the holist at this stage.

First, very small differences in individual conduct distributed irregularly over a large population, may have important consequences for the society at large without being detectable individually. The argument in favour of "social facts" is historically connected with the presence of statistical regularities where none can be found at the molecular, individual level. The statistical regularity can be explained in terms of features of the social situation as a whole, but in practice it is seldom possible to trace the nexus in individual cases. To insist that it is always "in principle" possible is to prejudge the issue under discussion. Moreover, something like an uncertainty principle may very well operate here, for the amount of disturbance involved in observing the individual case may very often be much larger than the small difference which accounts for the statistical result and may, so to speak, "drown it."

Secondly, individuals do have holistic concepts and often act in terms of them. For instance, a number of reviewers of the recently published *Memoirs of Général de Gaulle* have commented on the fact that de Gaulle's actions were inspired by his *ideo* of France—which may perhaps have had little relation to actual Frenchmen. When the holistic ideas of many individuals are co-ordinated and reinforced by public behavior and physical objects—by ceremonials, rituals, symbols, public buildings, etc.—it is difficult for the social scientist, though he observes the scene from the outside, not to use the holistic concept. It is quite true that the fact that X acts and thinks in terms of an holistic idea—e.g. he treats the totem as if it were his tribe, and the tribe as if it were more than the tribesmen—is itself a fact about an individual. On the other hand, though the holistic term as used by the observer may be eliminable, as used by the participant it is not. Are we to say that a logical impeccable explanation of a social situation is committed to crediting its subjects with nonsensical thought? Per-

haps we are. On the other hand, the fact that holistic terms are ineliminable from the thought of participants may well be a clue to their ineliminability from that of observers. For, in one sense, social environments *are* the *Gestalten* projected by individuals onto reality, provided they act in terms of them and provided reality is compatible with them and contains some devices for reinforcing them, such as rituals or other symbols, e.g. public buildings, totems, etc. (It is of course open to the Individualists to maintain that I have here given a schematic *individualist* account of the holistic *illusion*. Perhaps.)

It is perhaps unnecessary at this stage to insist on the fact that very little is gained by having individual dispositions as the bedrock of a historical or social explanation. Their "intelligibility" is either familiarity, or, equally often, springs from the fact that dispositional terms come in clusters each of which is a more or less exhaustive crude taxonomy: such as, perhaps, for instance: "Knowing - believing - considering - tacitly accepting - disregarding," or "wanting - being indifferent to - not wanting." If with the help of such terms we characterize someone's conduct, on the analogy of the parallelogram of forces, do we thereby really approach the actual causal sequences?

It is true that this kind of diagnosis fits fairly well in the case of one social science, namely, economics. This, however, is presumably due to the fact that this science restricts itself to behavior with regard to which aims and relevant convictions and explanations are reasonably avowable and specifiable; to some extent it may be said that economic theory applies to people who have been taught to act in accordance with it. Also, the words most frequently used by economists happen to be *ceteris paribus*. Moreover, whilst an economist may explain a man's behavior in a market situation, it takes a non-economist to explain how he ever comes to be economically rational. If, for instance, one comes to explain that in terms of the mundane application of a religious notion of "vocation," is that transition an "intelligible disposition?" Yes, in the sense that I see, roughly, what happens, know that it could happen to me, and if I believe it to be a regular occurrence may use it to explain particular incidents. But by those criteria any disposition can become "intelligible."<sup>6</sup>

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6. Having criticized the notion of "intelligibility" of human dispositions and in particular the accompanying suggestion that it gives us double access or confirmation of human reality, once through social appearance and secondly through dispositions as psychological things-in-themselves, I do wish to be interpreted as denying the importance of *Einfühlung*, of sympathetic understanding. But the nature and value of this method or heuristic device seems to me the very opposite to what is supposed by the reductionist. It lies in the familiarization with alien reactions and dispositions, not in forcing on them interpretations making them into variants of what is familiar anyway. This last may perhaps be the practice of economic theorists—but just that may help to explain the unreality of that discipline outside certain limits.

Collingwood's celebrated doctrines concerning this matter seem to amount perhaps to not much more than this: history like other disciplines uses the hypothetico-deductive method, and in history the hypotheses are usually about what people attempted to do. Stated thus, the doctrine becomes less startling. It also ceases to be open to the two criticisms normally levelled against it, namely that Collingwood took the Ghost in the

The real oddity of the reductionist case is that it seems to preclude *a priori* the possibility of human dispositions being the dependent variable in an historical explanation—when in fact this is what they often or always are—and secondly to preclude the possibility of causes, in the sense of initial conditions, being a complex fact which is not desirable in terms of the characteristics of its constituent parts alone—which again seems often to be the case.

Let it be added that in as far as the original argument is valid, it is equally valid for the non-human sciences. The fact that the natural sciences seem to be free from restrictions with regard to the kind of explanation they use does not derive from the fact that there are unobserved pieces of matter.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in natural science as much as anywhere else, wholes are composed of their constituent parts. Nothing follows from this truism concerning the general nature of the initial conditions in statements asserting a dependence. It does not restrict them to predicates which refer to dispositions of the atomic parts of a situation. Hence the "Wholes are made up of parts" tautology is not strong enough to entail the Individualist reduction. Physicists could, presumably, use animist language if they wished—they could speak of intelligible dispositions instead of the behavior of particles. It would not add anything, but as far as I can see it is not impossible.

The present paper is essentially an attempt to separate an indisputably true—because tautologous—proposition, (roughly "Assertions about people are assertions about people"), from its alleged implications which are at the very least questionable and hence not tautologous, and (hence) not its implications. One might equally have proceeded in the opposite direction and tried to separate the truism "Assertions about societies are assertions about society" from an alleged and mistaken consequence that societies "exist" in the same sense as individuals, or independently of them. But the contemporary climate of opinion makes this latter exercise less necessary.

A full clarification of these issues would probably be possible only if we were clearer about what is meant by causation in social contexts. A related matter which I have not pursued is the probability that what counts as "explanation" in history and in the social sciences is far from

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Machine too seriously, and secondly, that he misinterpreted an heuristic device as an essential characteristic of historical knowledge.

Further, "hypothetico-deductive method" is a misnomer. One can only speak of *method* where there is an alternative. But the only alternative to *this* way of studying things is not another way, but not studying them at all. For this "method" really means only thinking about things and then seeing whether what one had thought is true.

7. Evidently Watkins himself no longer holds this proof valid. He explains in the discussion note in the following number that he considers a counter-example to the principle of methodological individualism to be conceivable: so that the principle can hardly be susceptible of formal proof. But the counter-example envisaged by him is of the "group mind" type—dispositional interpretation predicated of social wholes, in my scheme—such as he thinks might be suggested by some facts from the social life of insects. My arguments against the Principle are quite independent of any such possibility. I am more than willing to concede that no phenomena calling for a "group mind" occur.



homogeneous in kind, any more than what counts as a "problem." This, over and above the particular difficulties discussed in this paper, may be a very serious objection to formal methodological arguments providing an *a priori* recipe for "explanation."

So far I have in this paper indicated what seem to me flaws in an attempted reduction. I have little doubt that actual procedure in historical and social explanation often is holistic, and that over and above this appeal to actual procedure, general reasons can be found, and probably stated more forcefully than I have stated them, to support the contention that this must be so. But it is equally obvious to me that this will not shake the determined individualist. Not only does he see important ethical issues hinging on his doctrine, but also some deep logical intuition which many of us can empathize would have to be represented by him before he could abandon his position. Indisputably, "history is about chaps"; hence "historical events must be explained in terms of what chaps do." Now we all agree that repression is a bad thing; hence it is desirable to diagnose and render harmless the compulsive insight, rather than merely argue against it.

Let us try to call up this intuition in ourselves by attending to the argument of one trying to demonstrate the impossibility of reducing holistic social concepts to individual ones.

Mandelbaum's recent argument, restating an old point in "language"—language, starts from the premiss that an action such as drawing money from the bank cannot be explained without the use of holistic concepts such as "banking system." This must be (at least tacitly) understood by the agent, and must be understood by the observer if he is to understand the action. When Mandelbaum says "explain" he might perhaps say "describe," for the rules of deposit banking are all somehow implicit in the concept of cashing a cheque. (A causal explanation *might* actually be simpler and not involve any understanding of the rules of banking.)

So far, there is nothing that need upset the individualist. Individuals act guided by nebulous holistic concepts—so far so good. As far as the object connoted by the concept is concerned the Individualist is sure that it can be "translated" in terms of what various individuals involved in banking institutions are doing. (Mandelbaum does not agree, on the grounds that the description of their activity in turn will involve use of the concept of "banking": but let us leave that aside for the moment.)

Let us just agree—as is indeed true—that drawing a cheque is internally related to the whole banking system, that what is meant by cashing a cheque involves by its very meaning the general features of banking; that, tacitly or otherwise, the concept "bank" is being employed by anyone describing or understanding the cashing of a cheque. I am stressing this, for the Individualist cannot but come with us this far.

It is the next step that he will refuse to take. This step emerges at the end of Mandelbaum's article, when he speaks of individuals and what he calls "societal facts" (e.g. banking systems) *interacting*; in other words, implying that it makes sense for the object of a holistic concept to have

an effect on a concrete individual. What the Individualist will here object to is the inference from an holistic concept, somehow abstracted from the concrete behavior of concrete individuals, being then able to figure in the antecedent of a causal sentence. He will refuse to admit this even if he concedes the ineliminability of the holistic concept in description. This seems indeed, he feels, to endow an abstraction with flesh and power; and we can easily feel this with him.

Of course, he isn't denying that causal statements of this kind are meaningfully and truthfully uttered. He only wishes to insist that the antecedent must in such cases be translatable into individualistic terms. Surely the insubstantial cannot constrain the substantial? I think we can provisionally agree to this principle; (though earlier we *seemed* to have contradicted it when uttering the truism that a cause may be as complex an event as we wish—as indeed it can). At the same time Mandelbaum's central point, that holistic concepts cannot be eliminated, stands. Here is a dilemma indeed.

*Attempted Diagnosis.* Consider the following two series:

(1) Jones is going to Germany. All members of the platoon are going, etc. All members of the company are going, etc. All members of the battalion are going, etc.

(2) Jones. That Platoon. The Company. The Battalion.

The first series begins with a singular proposition, and continues with general ones of increasing generality. The second series is one of terms or concepts or things, in which at each stage the preceding is or designates a part of the subsequent one.

Concerning series (1) it is obvious that each subsequent proposition can only be true in virtue of a set of propositions of the earlier kind being true. Propositions of the latter kind can, unless their subjects are open classes, be "reduced" or translated into conjunctions of propositions of the preceding kind. To talk of the more general propositions causing, constraining etc., those of lesser generality subsumed under them is nonsense.

Series (2) lists parts and wholes in such a manner that an earlier member of the series is always a part of a latter member. Latter members depend for their existence on the existence of earlier members, though not necessarily any definite list of them. *But:* there is no reason in logic or fact why causal sentences should in their antecedent clauses (or consequent clauses, for that matter) be restricted in their subjects to items of the kind that would only appear at the beginning of the series. If "complexity of causes" obtains, which it often seems to, causal sentences will have to have later members of the series as parts of their subjects.

The cause, or at any rate one of the central causes, of the general dilemma under discussion is the attribution of obvious features of series (1) to the series (2), concerning which they are certainly not obvious and probably not true.

For when we speak of societies we mean partly (a) generalizations

about classes of human individuals which indeed are true only in virtue of propositions about those individuals, and can be "reduced" to them, but also (b) groups, complexes, constellations of facts. These latter can indeed exist only if their parts exist—that is indeed the predicament of all wholes—but their fates *qua* fates of complexes can nevertheless be the initial conditions or indeed final conditions of a causal sequence.

The powerful disinclination to allow social or general causes arises from the confusion of (a) and (b). Jones is not caused to go to Germany by the general fact that all other members of the battalion are going; the general proposition merely *says*, amongst other things, that Jones is going. But there is no reason whatever for excluding *a priori* the possibility of unanimity of his comrades, *qua* unanimity, influencing Jones to volunteer to go. That all members of the unit feel the *esprit de corps* is a generalization; but to say that *esprit de corps* has influenced an individual is not to say that he has been influenced by isolable individuals or their acts.

It should now be clear that the following three propositions are not incompatible:

A generalization is true only in virtue of the truth of singular propositions.

A whole is made up of its parts.

No *a priori* legislation is possible concerning the complexity of links in causal chains.

The error of the Individualist is to conclude from the first two propositions, which are analytic, to the falsity of the third, through the confused identification of the hierarchy of propositions in terms of generality with the hierarchy of things in terms of complexity and inclusiveness.

Let us illustrate this with another example. If I say "All the men in the square were excited" I may simply mean a generalization to the effect that each of the men there was excited; in such a case it would make no sense to speak of the generalization as being an independent fact, less still a causal factor.

If, on the other hand, I say "There was an atmosphere of tension in the square," though this cannot be true without some of a nebulously defined and large set of propositions about the men in the square being true, and *a fortiori* it cannot be true unless there are men in the square, there is yet no way of interpreting this as a mere conjunction. We cannot even describe the state of mind of typical individual participants in the situation without referring back to the situation as a whole. This to some extent throws light on a fact mentioned earlier, namely that whatever the logical rights and wrongs of the case, individuals do think in holistic terms. What this amounts to—amongst other things—is the kind of patterns they are capable of isolating in their environment and react to. The pattern isolated, however, is not "merely abstracted" but is, as I am somewhat sheepishly tempted to say, "really there."

For any individual, the *mores*, institutions, tacit presupposition, etc., of his society are an independent and external fact, as much so as the physical environment and usually more important. And if this is so for

each individual, it does follow that it is so for the totality of individuals composing a society. Of course, societies not being endowed with group minds, the question doesn't arise for "the totality"; just because the individualist is in one sense right and "there is no such thing" as the "totality," the question of the externality and independence of social facts does not arise for it. But it can and does arise for the observer, who may of course be simultaneously a member of the society in question. And though he may in some cases account in some way for the social facts in terms of the interaction of individual decisions with prior "social facts," any attempt to eliminate these altogether will only lead to a regress and possibly to an irrelevant genetic question of the hen-and-egg kind. The important thing about "hen-and-egg" is not that we do not know, but that if we did know it would not throw much light on either hens or eggs.

It might be objected that too much is being made of this matter of causation. Complexity of causes is a familiar phenomenon; it does not follow from its occurrence that the constituents of a complex cause make up a "whole." My suggestion is that if perceived as a whole, referred to as such, etc., they do. It might again be objected that this merely shows that there are Social *Gestalten* incorporated in the perception by individuals of their social environment. But these *Gestalten* are so to speak veridical and efficacious; their objects, individual ways of behaving, conform to them and often act as their sanctions, as reminders to the perceiver of the *Gestalt* that its object is there and must be reckoned with. There re-inforcing acts are indeed acts of individuals; but they in turn are led to behave along the suitable lines by their perception of the same or similar "social fact."

The existence of a complex concept, parts of which are logically inseparable, is after all a familiar thing. For example, a mountain summit entails a slope, and so on. The complications which arise with regard to the present problem are two; first, that of the two constituents which appear to be so connected, i.e. individual men and their social context, one is tangible, the other not. (Of course, it is not "man" and any social context that is so connected, but individual acts and their contexts.) This leads to the desire to "reduce" the latter to the former, on the misguided assumption that unless this is done one would have to concede that the latter is similarly tangible. The reductionist indeed points both to the intangibility and necessary connection ("Without men and their doings, no society, institutions, etc."), and then mistakenly infers that a reduction must be possible. The second complication arises through the fact that in these subjects we are dealing with conscious men, in other words objects aware of things in the same way as the observer. Hence the complex concepts are met with twice over—once in the mind of the observer, and once in *re* as the dealings of the men with things and each other.

The confusion of the hierarchy of propositions graded by generality and of groups graded by size and inclusiveness leads to what might be called the Picture or Mirror theory of explanation.<sup>8</sup> The merits and other-

8. "Its overt characteristics (i.e. those of a 'complex social situation') may be established empirically, but they are only to be explained by being shown to be the resultants

wise of the picture theory of meaning and propositions is a familiar story, but the reappearance of this tempting model with regard to explanation deserves special treatment.

What seems to happen is something along the following lines. Take as an example a generalization such as "The committee decided to appoint Jones." This means, amongst other things, that each of the members of the committee came in the end to accept a certain conclusion, and if this were an important or interesting event, the historian or sociologist concerned with explaining it might be very happy if he could give an account of the ways by which each of the committee members came to reach his conclusion. This is indeed the paradigm of explanation as conceived by the Individualist—the feared Whole has evaporated in a series of partial biographies and character studies.

It is of course perfectly true that generalisations and abstractions do not give us additional facts; but it does not follow that all propositions whose subjects seem to include the "atoms"—whatever they may happen to be—of a particular discourse, are therefore necessarily generalisations, abstractions or somehow constructs. A failure to see this is the defect often attributed to "atomism" in other spheres, and sociological reductionism seems to be a related species.

In as far as the proposition used as an example is only a generalisation of the form "All members of the committee . . ." the alleged explanation, the paradigm of all explanations, is merely a verification and not an explanation at all. If this were all that could be done, explanation in history and the social sciences would be identical with the gathering of confirming evidence. To explain would be to illustrate; to illustrate fully, to provide the complete picture, would be to give the best explanation. But is this so?

Of course, the Individualist feels that something more should be involved in explanation than illustration, but he seeks it in broader generalisations about each of the committee-men involved; "broader" meaning either more persistent, or "simpler" in a sense to be indicated. There are what might be called simple disposition-types,—sloth, pursuit of gain, of power, or security, etc., of which the more idiosyncratic dispositions of individual men may perhaps be interpreted as variants or combinations.

An example of this kind of approach would be, for instance, the

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of individual activities." Watkins, *op. cit.* (*italics his*). This might be called the Stock Exchange theory. The opposite could easily be maintained; though I prefer merely to deny the second part of the statement. The temptation to believe that overt general features can be observed but must then be explained by something individual may spring from the fact that, for instance, the economist gets his empirical material pre-digested by the statistician. An index or a price level looks like a general fact. The field-worker is less tempted to believe that it is the overt feature of the social situation which he *observes*, whilst he only concludes about the individual. On the contrary, he is in close contact with the individuals with whom he passes the time of day, and if the explanations were *there*, he'd have his explanation as soon as he'd gathered his material, or at worst as soon as he had explored the characters of the individual. But this is not what happens. It cannot even be said that his task is the exploration of long-term and unforeseen consequences of individual dispositions. It is the consequences of social features that he is after.

eighteenth century attempt to explain moral feelings as combinations of sympathy and vengefulness: vengefulness on behalf of sufferers other than oneself, whose sufferings had been imaginatively re-lived, produces, say, a sense of justice. (This kind of approach, incidentally, is not *always* unfruitful; I am only arguing against the contention that historical or social explanation must always employ it.)

It is difficult to see how this attempt to bring in explanation which is more than illustration differs from what has sometimes been called psychologism.<sup>9</sup> The objection to it is that there is no way in general of isolating these pure or more persistent dispositions from the social context in which they occur. We have indeed two impossibilities here, one causal and one logical. Popper's argument against psychologism makes use of the former, Mandelbaum's of the latter. As a matter of causal fact, our dispositions are not independent of the social context in which they occur; but they are not even independent logically, for they cannot be described without reference to their social context.

What the Individualist is demanding might be described, from the viewpoint of an institution, as the translation from the Active into the Passive Voice; the translation of statements such as "such and such a kind of family organization tends to perpetuate itself" into statements such as "As a result of such and such aims, convictions, dispositions, etc., of individuals, this kind of family organization continues." (To the Individualist it seems, of course, that the translation is into a "really" Active Voice, on the general ground that institutions, etc., being constructs from individual behavior, *must* "really" be passive.) But the undesirability of such a translation in some cases follows partly from various considerations already stated such as the diffused, individually imperceptible nature of some of these dispositions, or the fact that they refer back to the institutional context, and also from the fact that they may be utterly uninteresting because obvious. The only relevant dispositions may be, to take the example of the permanence of a kind of family organization, the normal sexual, security and reproductive aspirations which do not distinguish people in that social context from others. The *differentia*, which as the distinctive component in a complex set of conditions will be worthy of the investigator's attention may well be something institutional and not psychological. It is perfectly possible, for instance, that there are no psychological differences of any importance between two European countries of widely divergent institutions, and that to explain the differentiation is only possible in sociological, not in psychological terms. Of course, psychological differences *may* be significant. The harm done by the kind of Individualism discussed, if taken seriously by investigators, is that it leads to a conviction that such differences must always be present and be significant. The danger of this pre-conception

9. Cf. K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, chap. 14. In this chapter Popper refers to both "psychologism," which he condemns, and "methodological individualism," which he commends. When, in the articles discussed, "methodological individualism" is worked out more fully than is the case in Popper's book, it seems to me indistinguishable from "Psychologism."

seems to me graver at present than the one which worries the Individualist, namely that of "reifying" abstractions.

In fact, some historical or sociological explanations—as when, for instance, an historian explains the growth of an institution, or an anthropologist the self-maintenance of a social structure—will do this in terms of features of the relevant institution or structure without explicit mention of any individual dispositions.

At this point the Individualist will no doubt protest that despite the absence of explicit mention of individual dispositions, implicitly they are present; ultimately, every social event must have its habitat in the individual psyche. Now this must be conceded: if Individualism is to degenerate into what could be called social Monadism, the desperate incorporation of complex and diffuse relations into the related terms or individuals, then it must be admitted to be true "in a sense." "Algy met a bear, the bear was bulgy, the bulge was Algy"; the individual may consume what Durkheim and others have called social facts, but he will bulge most uncomfortably, and Algy will still be there.<sup>10</sup> I suspect that actual investigators will often, though perhaps not always, prefer to have Algy outside the bear.<sup>11</sup>

The uselessness of Monadism-at-all-costs can be illustrated thus: certain tribes I know have what anthropologists call a segmentary patrilineal structure, which moreover maintains itself very well over time. I could "explain" this by saying that the tribesmen have, all or most of them, dispositions whose effect is to maintain the system. But, of course, not only have they never given the matter much thought, but it also might very well be impossible to isolate anything in the characters and conduct of the individual tribesmen which *explains* how they come to maintain the system (though of course conduct *illustrating* how the system is being maintained will be found).

The recipe for reduction which we are considering does not commit the older errors of inventing dispositions *ad hoc* for each social thing to be explained, or of deriving social conduct from alleged pre-social, pure dispositions. It claims as its explanations low-level generalisations about the conduct of individuals.

But: these dispositions are not always relevant; sometimes or often they are not isolable without this affecting the possibility of explanation; they are not independent variables, but usually depend on highly generalized social factors; and they are often not statable without reference to social facts. If Individualism does not deny all this, perhaps nothing remains to disagree with it about; but if indeed it does not deny this, its programmatic implications for historians and social scientists no longer hold.

Perhaps, in the end, there is agreement to this extent: (human) history is about chaps—and nothing else. But perhaps this should be written:

10. Social phenomena have always been most suggestive of the Principle of Internal Relations. This principle is frequently being re-discovered by social scientists.

11. The Individualist maintains that Algy always was in the bear. Yes, if you like. But the bear isn't Algy, though the bulge is Algy.

History is *about* chaps. It does not follow that its explanations are always in terms of chaps. Societies are what people do, but social scientists are not biographers *en grande série*.

## J. W. N. WATKINS

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J. W. N. WATKINS was born in 1924. He was Henry Fellow at Yale University from 1949 to 1950. In 1950 he joined the staff of the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has contributed articles to various philosophical periodicals, and his "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation" was published in *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, edited by H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck.

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### Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences\*

1. *Introduction.* The hope which originally inspired methodology was the hope of finding a method of enquiry which would be both necessary and sufficient to guide the scientist unerringly to truth. This hope has died a natural death. Today, methodology has the more modest task of establishing certain rules and requirements which are necessary to prohibit some wrong-headed moves but insufficient to guarantee success. These rules and requirements, which circumscribe scientific enquiries without steering them in any specific direction, are of the two main kinds, formal and material. So far as I can see, the formal rules of scientific method (which comprise both logical rules and certain realistic and fruitful stipulations) are equally applicable to all the empirical sciences. You cannot, for example,

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deduce a universal law from a finite number of observations whether you are a physicist, a biologist, or an anthropologist. Again, a single comprehensive explanation of a whole range of phenomena is preferable to isolated explanations of each of those phenomena, whatever your field of enquiry. I shall therefore confine myself to the more disputable (I had nearly said "more disreputable") and metaphysically impregnated part of methodology which tries to establish the appropriate *material* requirements which the *contents* of the premisses of an explanatory theory in a particular field ought to satisfy. These requirements may be called regulative principles. Fundamental differences in the subject-matters of different sciences—differences to which formal methodological rules are impervious—ought, presumably, to be reflected in the regulative principles appropriate to each science. It is here that the student of the methods of the social sciences may be expected to have something distinctive to say.

An example of a regulative principle is mechanism, a metaphysical theory which governed thinking in the physical sciences from the 17th century until it was largely superseded by a wave or field world-view. According to mechanism, the ultimate constituents of the physical world are impenetrable particles which obey simple mechanical laws. The existence of these particles cannot be explained—at any rate by science. On the other hand, every complex physical thing or event is the result of a particular configuration of particles and can be explained in terms of the laws governing their behavior in conjunction with a description of their relative positions, masses, momenta, etc. There may be what might be described as unfinished or half-way explanations of large-scale phenomena (say, the pressure inside a gas-container) in terms of other large-scale factors (the volume and temperature of the gas); but we shall not have arrived at rock-bottom explanations of such large-scale phenomena until we have deduced their behavior from statements about the properties and relations of particles.

This is a typically metaphysical idea (by which I intend nothing derogatory). True, it is confirmed, even massively confirmed, by the huge success of mechanical theories which conform to its requirements. On the other hand, it is untestable. No experiment could overthrow it. If certain phenomena—say, electromagnetic phenomena—seem refractory to this mechanistic sort of explanation, this refractoriness can always (and perhaps rightly) be attributed to our inability to find a successful mechanical model rather than to an error in our metaphysical intuition about the ultimate constitution of the physical world. But while mechanism is weak enough to be compatible with any *observation* whatever, while it is an untestable and unempirical principle, it is strong enough to be incompatible with various conceivable physical *theories*. It is this which makes it a *regulative*, non-vacuous metaphysical principle. If it were compatible with everything it would regulate nothing. Some people complain that regulative principles discourage research in certain directions, but that is a part of their purpose. You cannot encourage research in one direction without discouraging research in rival directions.

I am not an advocate of mechanism but I have mentioned it because I am an advocate of an analogous principle in social science, the principle of methodological individualism.<sup>1</sup> According to this principle, the ultimate constituents of the social world are individual people who act more or less appropriately in the light of their dispositions and understanding of their situation. Every complex social situation, institution or event is the result of a particular configuration of individuals, their dispositions, situations, beliefs, and physical resources and environment. There may be unfinished or half-way explanations of large-scale social phenomena (say, inflation) in terms of other large-scale phenomena (say, full employment); but we shall not have arrived at rock-bottom explanations of such large-scale phenomena until we have deduced an account of them from statements about the dispositions, beliefs, resources and inter-relations of individuals. (The individuals may remain anonymous and only typical dispositions etc., may be attributed to them.) And just as mechanism is contrasted with the organicist idea of physical fields, so methodological individualism is contrasted with sociological holism or organicism. On this latter view, social systems constitute "wholes" at least in the sense that some of their large-scale behaviour is governed by macro-laws which are essentially sociological in the sense that they are *sui generis* and not to be explained as mere regularities or tendencies resulting from the behaviour of interacting individuals. On the contrary, the behaviour of individuals should (according to sociological holism) be explained at least partly in terms of such laws (perhaps in conjunction with an account, first of individuals' roles within institutions, and secondly of the functions of institutions within the whole social system). If methodological individualism means that human beings are supposed to be the only moving agents in history, and if sociological holism means that some superhuman agents or factors are supposed to be at work in history, then these two alternatives are exhaustive. An example of such a superhuman, sociological factor is the alleged long-term cyclical wave in economic life which is supposed to be self-propelling, uncontrollable and inexplicable in terms of human activity, but in terms of the fluctuations of which such large-scale phenomena as wars, revolutions and mass emigration, and such psychological factors as scientific and technological inventiveness, can, it is claimed, be explained and predicted.

I say "and predicted" because the irreducible sociological laws postulated by holists are usually regarded by them as laws of social development, as laws governing the dynamics of a society. This makes holism well-nigh equivalent to historicism, to the idea that a society is impelled along a pre-determined route by historical laws which cannot be resisted but

1. Both of these analogous principles go back at least to Epicurus. In recent times methodological individualism has been powerfully defended by Professor F. A. Hayek in his *Individualism and Economic Order* and *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, and by Professor K. R. Popper in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. Following in their foot-steps I have also attempted to defend methodological individualism in "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation" in *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Feigl and Brodbeck. This article has come in for a good deal of criticism, the chief items of which I shall try to rebut in what follows.

which can be discerned by the sociologist. The holist-historicist position has, in my view, been irretrievably damaged by Professor Popper's attacks on it. I shall criticise this position only insofar as this will help me to elucidate and defend the individualistic alternative to it. The central assumption of the individualistic position—an assumption which is admittedly counterfactual and metaphysical—is that no social tendency exists which could not be altered if the individuals concerned both wanted to alter it and possessed the appropriate information. (They might want to alter the tendency but, through ignorance of the facts and/or failure to work out some of the implications of their action, fail to alter it, or perhaps even intensify it.) This assumption could also be expressed by saying that no social tendency is somehow imposed on human beings "from above" (or "from below")—social tendencies are the product (usually undesigned) of human characteristics and activities and situations, of people's ignorance and laziness as well as of their knowledge and ambition. (An example of a social tendency is the tendency of industrial units to grow larger. I do not call "social" those tendencies which are determined by uncontrollable physical factors, such as the alleged tendency for more male babies to be born in times of disease or war.)<sup>2</sup>

My procedure will be: first to de-limit the sphere in which method-

2. The issue of holism vs individualism in social science has recently been presented as though it were a question of the existence or non-existence of irreducibly social *facts* rather than of irreducibly sociological *laws*. (See M. Mandelbaum, "Societal Facts," *The British Journal of Sociology*, vi, 4, December, 1955, reprinted in this volume, p. 476, and E. A. Gellner, "Explanations in History," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, XXX, 1956, reprinted in this volume as "Holism versus Individualism in History and Sociology," p. 489, above.) This way of presenting the issue seems to me to empty it of most of its interest. If a new kind of beast is discovered, what we want to know is not so much whether it falls outside existing zoological categories, but how it behaves. People who insist on the existence of social facts but who do not say whether they are governed by sociological laws, are like people who claim to have discovered an unclassified kind of animal but who do not tell us whether it is tame or dangerous, whether it can be domesticated or is unmanageable. If an answer to the question of social facts could throw light on the serious and interesting question of sociological laws, then the question of social facts would also be serious and interesting. But this is not so. On the one hand, a holist may readily admit (as I pointed out in my "Ideal Types" paper, which Gellner criticises) that all *observable* social facts are reducible to individual facts and yet hold that the latter are invisibly governed by irreducibly sociological laws. On the other hand, an individualist may readily admit (as Gellner himself says) that some large social facts are simply too complex for a full reduction of them to be feasible, and yet hold that individualistic explanations of them are in principle possible, just as a physicist may readily admit that some physical facts (for instance, the precise blast-effects of a bomb-explosion in a built-up area) are just too complex for accurate prediction or explanation of them to be feasible and yet hold that precise explanations and predictions of them in terms of existing scientific laws are in principle possible.

This revised way of presenting the holism vs individualism issue does not only divert attention from the important question. It also tends to turn the dispute into a purely verbal issue. Thus Mandelbaum is able to prove the existence of what he calls 'societal facts' because he defines psychological facts very narrowly as 'facts concerning the thoughts and actions of specific human beings' (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. —). Consequently, the *dispositions* of *anonymous* individuals which play such an important role in individualistic explanations in social science are "societal facts" merely by definition.

ological individualism works in two directions; secondly, to clear methodological individualism of certain misunderstandings; thirdly, to indicate how fruitful and surprising individualistic explanations can be and how individualistic social theories can lead to sociological discoveries; and fourthly, to consider in somewhat more detail how, according to methodological individualism, we should frame explanations, first for social regularities or repeatable processes, and secondly for unique historical constellations of events.

2. *Where Methodological Individualism Does Not Work.* There are two areas in which methodological individualism does not work.

The first is a probability-situation where accidental and unpredictable irregularities in human behaviour have a fairly regular and predictable overall result.<sup>3</sup> Suppose I successively place 1,000 individuals facing north in the centre of a symmetrical room with two exits, one east, the other west. If about 500 leave by one exit and about 500 by the other I would not try to explain this in terms of tiny undetectable west-inclining and east-inclining differences in the individuals for the same reason that A. Landé would not try to explain the fact that about 500 balls will topple over to the west and about 500 to the east if 1,000 balls are dropped from immediately above a north-south blade in terms of tiny undetectable west-inclining and east-inclining differences in the balls. For in both cases such an "explanation" would merely raise the further problem: why should these west-inclining and east-inclining differences be distributed approximately *equally* among the individuals and among the balls?

Those statistical regularities in social life which are inexplicable in individualistic terms for the sort of reason I have quoted here are, in a sense, inhuman, the outcome of a large number of sheer accidents. The outcome of a large number of decisions is usually much less regular and predictable because variable human factors (changes of taste, new ideas, swings from optimism to pessimism) which have little or no influence on accident-rates are influential here. Thus Stock Exchange prices fluctuate widely from year to year, whereas the number of road-accidents does not fluctuate widely. But the existence of these actuarial regularities does not, as has often been alleged, support the historicist idea that defenseless individuals like you and me are at the chance mercy of the inhuman and uncontrollable tendencies of our society. It does not support a secularised version of the Calvinist idea of an Almighty Providence who picks people at random to fill His fixed damnation-quota. For we can control these statistical regularities insofar as we can alter the conditions on which they depend. For example we could obviously abolish road-accidents if we were prepared to prohibit motor-traffic.

The second kind of social phenomenon to which methodological individualism is inapplicable is where some kind of physical connection between people's nervous systems short-circuits their intelligent control and causes

3. Failure to exclude probability-situations from the ambit of methodological individualism was an important defect of my "Ideal Types" paper. Here, Gellner's criticism, *op. cit.*, this volume, p. 493, does hit the nail on the head.

automatic, and perhaps in some sense appropriate, bodily responses. I think that a man may more or less literally smell danger and instinctively back away from unseen ambushers; and individuality seems to be temporarily submerged beneath a collective physical *rapport* at jive-sessions and revivalist meetings and among panicking crowds. But I do not think that these spasmodic mob-organisms lend much support to holism or constitute a very serious exception to methodological individualism. They have a fleeting existence which ends when their members put on their mufflers and catch the 'bus or otherwise disperse, whereas holists have conceived of a social whole as something which endures through generations of men; and whatever holds together typical long-lived institutions, like a bank or a legal system or a church, it certainly is not the physical proximity of their members.

3. *Misunderstandings of Methodological Individualism.* I will now clear methodological individualism of two rather widespread misunderstandings.

It has been objected that in making individual dispositions and beliefs and situations the terminus of an explanation in social science, methodological individualism implies that a person's psychological make-up is, so to speak, God-given, whereas it is in fact conditioned by, and ought to be explained in terms of, his social inheritance and environment.<sup>4</sup> Now methodological individualism certainly does not prohibit attempts to explain the formation of psychological characteristics; it only requires that such explanations should in turn be *individualistic*, explaining the formation as a result of a series of conscious or unconscious responses by an individual to his changing situation. For example, I have heard Professor Paul Sweczey, the Harvard economist, explain that he became a marxist because his father, a Wall Street broker, sent him in the 1930's to the London School of Economics to study under those staunch liberal economists, Professors Hayek and Robbins. This explanation is perfectly compatible with methodological individualism (though hardly compatible, I should have thought, with the marxist idea that ideologies reflect class-positions) because it interprets his ideological development as a human response to his situation. It is, I suppose, psycho-analysts who have most systematically worked the idea of a thorough individualist and historical explanation of the formation of dispositions, unconscious fears and beliefs, and subsequent defense-mechanisms, in terms of responses to emotionally charged, and especially childhood, situations.

My point could be put by saying that methodological individualism encourages *innocent* explanations but forbids *sinister* explanations of the widespread existence of a disposition among the members of a social group. Let me illustrate this by quoting from a reply I made to Mr. Goldstein's

4. Thus Gellner writes: "The real oddity of the reductionist [i.e., the methodological individualist's] case is that it seems to preclude *a priori* the possibility of human dispositions being the dependent variable in an historical explanation—when in fact they often or always are" (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. 495). And Mr. Leon J. Goldstein says that in making human dispositions methodologically primary I ignore their cultural conditioning (*The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LIII, 1956, p. 807).

criticisms. "Suppose that it is established that Huguenot traders were relatively prosperous in 17th century France and that this is explained in terms of a widespread disposition among them (a disposition for which there is independent evidence) to plough back into their businesses a larger proportion of their profits than was customary among their Catholic competitors. Now this explanatory disposition might very well be explained in its turn—perhaps in terms of the general thriftiness which Calvinism is said to encourage, and/or in terms of the fewer alternative outlets for the cash resources of people whose religious disabilities prevented them from buying landed estates or political offices. (I cannot vouch for the historical accuracy of this example.)

"I agree that methodological individualism allows the formation, or 'cultural conditioning,' of a widespread disposition to be explained only in terms of other human factors and not in terms of something inhuman, such as an alleged historicist law which forces people will-nilly into some pre-determined mould. But this is just the anti-historicist point of methodological individualism."

Unfortunately, it is typically a part of the program of marxist and other historicist sociologies to try to account for the formation of ideologies and other psychological characteristics in strictly sociological and non-psychological terms. Marx, for instance, professed to believe that feudal ideas and *bourgeois* ideas are more or less literally generated by the water-mill and the steam-engine. But no description, however complete, of the productive apparatus of a society, or of any other non-psychological factors, will enable you to deduce a single psychological conclusion from it, because psychological statements logically cannot be deduced from wholly non-psychological statements. Thus whereas the mechanistic idea that explanations in physics cannot go behind the impenetrable particles is a prejudice (though a very understandable prejudice), the analogous idea that an explanation which begins by imputing some social phenomenon to human factors cannot go on to explain those factors in terms of some inhuman determinant of them is a necessary truth. That the human mind develops under various influences the methodological individualist does not, of course, deny. He only insists that such development must be explained "innocently" as a series of responses by the individual to situations and not "sinisterly" and illogically as a direct causal outcome of non-psychological factors, whether these are neurological factors, or impersonal sociological factors alleged to be at work in history.

Another cause of complaint against methodological individualism is that it has been confused with a narrow species of itself (Popper calls it "psychologism") and even, on occasion, with a still narrower sub-species of this (Popper calls it the "Conspiracy Theory of Society").<sup>5</sup> Psychologism says that all large-scale social characteristics are not merely the intended or unintended result of, but a *reflection* of, individual characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Thus

5. See K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2nd Ed. 1952, ch. 14.

6. I am at a loss to understand how Gellner came to make the following strange

Plato said that the character and make-up of a *polis* is a reflection of the character and make-up of the kind of soul predominant in it. The conspiracy theory says that all large-scale social phenomena (do not merely reflect individual characteristics but) are deliberately brought about by individuals or groups of individuals.

Now there are social phenomena, like mass unemployment, which it would not have been in anyone's interest deliberately to bring about and which do not appear to be large-scale social reflections or magnified duplicates of some individual characteristic. The practical or technological or therapeutic importance of social science largely consists in explaining, and thereby perhaps rendering politically manageable, the unintended and unfortunate consequences of the behavior of interacting individuals. From this pragmatic point of view, psychologism and the conspiracy theory are unrewarding doctrines. Psychologism says that only a change of heart can put a stop to, for example, war (I think that this is Bertrand Russell's view). The conspiracy theory, faced with a big bad social event, leads to a hunt for scape-goats. But methodological individualism, by imputing unwanted social phenomena to individuals' responses to their situations, in the light of their dispositions and beliefs, suggests that we may be able to make the phenomena disappear, not by recruiting good men to fill the posts hitherto occupied by bad men, nor by trying to destroy men's socially unfortunate dispositions while fostering their socially beneficial dispositions, but simply by altering the situations they confront. To give a current example, by confronting individuals with dearer money and reduced credit the Government may (I do not say will) succeed in halting inflation without requiring a new self-deceiving attitude on the part of consumers and without sending anyone to prison.

#### 4. *Factual Discoveries in Social Science.* To explain the unintended but

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assertion: "... Popper refers to both 'psychologism' which he condemns, and 'methodological individualism,' which he commends. When in the articles discussed [i.e., my 'Ideal Types' paper], 'methodological individualism' is worked out more fully than is the case in Popper's book, it seems to me to be indistinguishable from 'Psychologism'" (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. 501 n.). Finding no difference between methodological individualism and a caricature of methodological individualism, Gellner has no difficulty in poking fun at the whole idea: "Certain tribes I know have what anthropologists call a segmentary patrilineal structure, which moreover maintains itself very well over time. I could 'explain' this by saying that the tribesmen have, all or most of them, dispositions whose effect is to maintain the system. But, of course, not only have they never given the matter much thought, but it also might very well be impossible to isolate anything in the characters and conduct of the individual tribesmen which *explains* how they come to maintain the system" (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. 502). Yet this example actually suggests the lines along which an individualistic explanation might be found. The very fact that the tribesmen *have never given the matter much thought*, the fact that they accept their inherited system uncritically, may constitute an important part of an explanation of its stability. The explanation might go on to pin-point certain rules—that is firm and widespread dispositions—about marriage, inheritance, etc., which help to regularize the tribesmen's behaviour towards their kinsmen. How they come to share these common dispositions could also be explained individualistically in the same sort of way that I can explain why my young children are already developing a typically English attitude towards policemen.

beneficial consequences of individual activities—by “beneficial consequences” I mean social consequences which the individuals affected *would* endorse if they were called on to choose between their continuation or discontinuation—is usually a task of less practical urgency than the explanation of undesirable consequences. On the other hand, this task may be of greater theoretical interest. I say this because people who are painfully aware of the existence of unwanted social phenomena may be oblivious of the unintended but beneficial consequences of men's actions, rather as a man may be oblivious of the good health to which the smooth functioning of his digestion, nervous system, circulation, etc. give rise. Here, an explanatory theory may surprise and enlighten us not only with regard to the connections between causes and effect but with regard to the existence of the effect itself. By showing that a certain economic system contains positive feed-back leading to increasingly violent oscillations and crises an economist may explain a range of well advertised phenomena which have long been the subject of strenuous political agitation. But the economists who first showed that a certain kind of economic system contains negative feed-back which tends to iron out disturbances and restore equilibrium, not only explained, but also revealed the existence of, phenomena which had hardly been remarked upon before.<sup>7</sup>

I will speak of organic-like social behavior where members of some social system (that is, a collection of people whose activities disturb and influence each other) mutually adjust themselves to the situations created by the others in a way which, without direction from above, conduces to the equilibrium or preservation or development of the system. (These are again evaluative notions, but they can also be given a “would-be-endorsed-if” definition.) Now such far-flung organic-like behavior, involving people widely separated in space and largely ignorant of each other, cannot be simply observed. It can only be theoretically reconstructed—by deducing the distant social consequences of the typical responses of a large number of interacting people to certain repetitive situations. This explains why individualistic-minded economists and anthropologists, who deny that societies really are organisms, have succeeded in piecing together a good deal of unsuspected organic-like social behavior from an examination of individual dispositions and situations, whereas sociological holists, who insist that societies really are organisms, have been noticeably unsuccessful in convincingly displaying any organic-like social behavior—they cannot observe it and they do not try to reconstruct it individualistically.

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7. This sentence, as I have since learnt from Dr. A. W. Phillips, is unduly complacent, for it is very doubtful whether an economist can ever *show* that an economic system containing negative feed-back will be stable. For negative feed-back may produce either a tendency towards equilibrium, or increasing oscillations, according to the numerical values of the parameters of the system. But numerical values are just what economic measurements, which are usually ordinal rather than cardinal, seldom yield. The belief that a system which contains negative feed-back, but whose variables cannot be described quantitatively, is stable may be based on faith or experience, but it cannot be shown mathematically. See A. W. Phillips, “Stabilisation Policy and the Time-Forms of Lagged Responses,” *The Economic Journal*, Vol. LXVII, June, 1957.



There is a parallel between holism and psychologism which explains their common failure to make surprising discoveries. A large-scale social characteristic should be explained, according to psychologism, as the manifestation of analogous small-scale psychological tendencies in individuals, and according to holism as the manifestation of a large-scale tendency in the social whole. In both cases, the *explicans* does little more than duplicate the *explicandum*. The methodological individualist, on the other hand, will try to explain the large-scale effect as the *indirect*, unexpected, complex product of individual factors none of which, singly, may bear any resemblance to it at all. To use hackneyed examples, he may show that a longing for peace led, in a certain international situation, to war, or that a government's desire to improve a bad economic situation by balancing its budget only worsened the situation. Since Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* was published in 1714, individualistic social science, with its emphasis on unintended consequences, has largely been a sophisticated elaboration on the simple theme that, in certain situations, selfish private motives may have good social consequences and good political intentions bad social consequences.<sup>8</sup>

Holists draw comfort from the example of biology, but I think that the parallel is really between the biologist and the methodological individualist. The biologist does not, I take it, explain the large changes which occur during, say, pregnancy, in terms of corresponding large teleological tendencies in the organism, but physically, in terms of small chemical, cellular, neurological, etc., changes, none of which bears any resemblance to their joint and seemingly planful outcome.

5. *How Social Explanations Should Be Framed.* I will now consider how regularities in social life, such as the trade cycle, should be explained according to methodological individualism. The explanation should be in terms of individuals and their situations; and since the process to be explained is repeatable, liable to recur at various times and in various parts of the world, it follows that only very general assumptions about human dispositions can be employed in its explanation. It is no use looking to abnormal psychology for an explanation of the structure of interest-rates—everyday experience must contain the raw material for the dispositional (as opposed to the situational) assumptions required by such an explanation. It may require a stroke of genius to detect, isolate, and formulate precisely the

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8. A good deal of unmerited opposition to methodological individualism seems to spring from the recognition of the undoubted fact that individuals often run into social obstacles. Thus the conclusion at which Mandelbaum arrives is "that there are societal facts which exercise external constraints over individuals" (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. 488). This conclusion is perfectly harmonious with the methodological individualist's insistence that plans often miscarry (and that even when they do succeed they almost invariably have other important and unanticipated effects). The methodological individualist only insists that the social environment by which any particular individual is confronted and frustrated and sometimes manipulated and occasionally destroyed is, if we ignore its physical ingredients, made up of other people, their habits, inertia, loyalties, rivalries and so on. What the methodological individualist denies is that an individual is ever frustrated, manipulated or destroyed or borne along by *irreducible* sociological or historical tendencies or laws,

dispositional premises of an explanation of a social regularity. These premises may state what no one had noticed before, or give a sharp articulation to what had hitherto been loosely described. But once stated they will seem obvious enough. It took years of groping by brilliant minds before a precise formulation was found for the principle of diminishing marginal utility. But once stated, the principle that the less relatively, a man has of one divisible commodity the more compensation he will be disposed to require for fore-going a small fixed amount of it is a principle to which pretty well everyone will give his consent. Yet this simple and almost platitudinous principle is the magic key to the economics of distribution and exchange.

The social scientist is, here, in a position analogous to that of the Cartesian mechanist.<sup>9</sup> The latter never set out to discover new and unheard-of physical principles because he believed that his own principle of action-by-contact was self-evidently ultimate. His problem was to discover the typical physical configurations, the mechanisms, which, operating according to this principle, produce the observed regularities of nature. His theories took the form of models which exhibited such regularities as the outcome of "self-evident" physical principles operating in some hypothetical physical situation. Similarly, the social scientist does not make daring innovations in psychology but relies on familiar, almost "self-evident" psychological material. His skill consists, first in spotting the relevant dispositions, and secondly in inventing a simple but realistic model which shows how, in a precise type of situation, those dispositions generate some typical regularity or process. (His model, by the way, will also show that in this situation certain things cannot happen. His negative predictions of the form, "If you've got this you can't have that as well" may be of great practical importance.) The social scientist can now explain in principle historical examples of this regular process, provided his model does in fact fit the historical situation.

This view of the explanation of social regularities incidentally clears up the old question on which so much ink has been spilt about whether the so-called "laws" of economics apply universally or only to a particular "stage" of economic development. The simple answer is that the economic principles displayed by economists' models apply only to those situations which correspond with their models; but a single model may very well correspond with a very large number of historical situations widely separated in space and time.

In the explanation of regularities the same situational scheme or model is used to reconstruct a number of historical situations with a similar structure in a way which reveals how typical dispositions and beliefs of anonymous individuals generated, on each occasion, the same regularity.<sup>10</sup> In the explanation of a unique constellation of events the individualistic

9. I owe this analogy to Professor Popper.

10. This should rebut Gellner's conclusion that methodological individualism would transform social scientists into "biographers *en grande serie*" (*op. cit.*, this volume, p. 503).

method is again to reconstruct the historical situation, or connected sequence of situations, in a way which reveals how (usually both named and anonymous) individuals, with their beliefs and dispositions (which may include peculiar personal dispositions as well as typical human dispositions), generated, in this particular situation, the joint product to be explained. I emphasize *dispositions*, which are open and law-like, as opposed to *decisions*, which are occurrences, for this reason. A person's set of dispositions ought, under varying conditions, to give rise to appropriately varying decisions. The subsequent occurrence of an appropriate decision will both confirm, and be explained by, the existence of the dispositions. Suppose that a historical explanation (of, say, the growth of the early Catholic Church) largely relies on a particular decision (say, the decision of Emperor Constantine to give Pope Silvester extensive temporal rights in Italy). The explanation is, so far, rather *ad hoc*: an apparently arbitrary *fiat* plays a key role in it. But if this decision can in turn be explained as the off-spring of a marriage of a set of dispositions (for instance, the Emperor's disposition to subordinate all rival power to himself) to a set of circumstances (for instance, the Emperor's recognition that Christianity could not be crushed but could be tamed if it became the official religion of the Empire), and if the existence of these dispositions and circumstances is convincingly supported by independent evidence, then the area of the arbitrarily given, of sheer brute fact in history, although it can never be made to vanish, will have been significantly reduced.

### Ernest Gellner: Reply to Mr. Watkins

Watkins suggests that discussing the issue in terms of the existence of social *facts* rather than *laws* empties it of most of its interest. I doubt whether in fact anyone argued in favor of irreducible social facts just in a *l'art pour l'art* spirit. To insist on social facts is, if you like to put it that way, a manner of saying something about sociological laws: namely, that they cannot all have a certain form, that they cannot invariably be psychological laws or the corollaries of psychological laws or statements.

Watkins says he is at a loss to understand how I came to conclude that what Popper calls psychologism is indistinguishable from methodological individualism as more fully worked out by Watkins. This is the way I came to that view. Methodological individualism insists that individual dispositions, etc., alone must be the ultimate elements by which a social situation is explained. It is not denied that a situation results from the interaction of an individual and a social context, but it is maintained that this context itself must be similarly explicable. The defect in this is, to

my mind, the unending regress involved; a new social milieu has to be mentioned each time the individualistic explanation is taken one stage further. But this precisely is Popper's objection against psychologism. My conclusion regarding the difficulty of distinguishing the two doctrines resulted, therefore, from their being open to the same criticism. If this doesn't entail their identity it at least suggests that they overlap at crucial points.

The regress that seems to me involved can be illustrated in terms of the example Watkins takes over. The impact of rules and how tribesmen come to accept them can indeed be explained individualistically—to that extent I agree—meaning by this that a description of what is happening to individuals is always involved; but not without reference to the social background as a factor, and to that extent I disagree, at least with what I take methodological individualism to be saying.

This abstract problem has its empirical, heuristic counterpart even if standpoints on the latter are not strictly entailed by standpoints on the former. The attitude encouraged by individualism is either a methodology which encourages *deduction* from simple psychological premises (e.g., economic theory), or research into social variation of the *psyche* by projection tests, etc. Both neglect institutions, and neither seems to me as fruitful, in some contexts at least, as the study of institutions.

Finally, I should like to say that I still find the problem confusing, that my criticism of what seems to me over-simple reduction is not an argument for a *mystique* of the social whole, and that my guess is that the solution may be found in more careful distinguishing of the way in which whole-and-part, generalization-and-instance, premise-and-conclusion, cause-and-entity and perhaps other dichotomies enter into statements one can make about men and groups; and that clarification of the issue, rather than a trial of two protagonists assumed to have rival and incompatible claims, is called for with regard to this problem.



This bibliography is divided into three sections: works by and about classical philosophers of history; source books, general commentaries, and works on methodology; and articles. In the first section a chronological order has been adopted; in the other sections the arrangement is alphabetical. The word "classical" has been used in the title of Section A for want of a better term. It is not implied that authors listed in this section are necessarily more important than others not included. The references to articles do not give the numbers of the periodicals or proceedings in which they appear, but the date of the volumes in which these numbers fall. This is in conformity with the other volumes in this series.

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## C.

## Articles

The following abbreviations for journals and periodicals are used in this section:

A	<i>Analysis</i>	Ar. Soc. Sup.	<i>Proceedings of the</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>		<i>Aristotelian Society</i>
			<i>Supplementary Volumes</i>
AJP	<i>Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy</i>	BJPS	<i>British Journal for the Philosophy of Science</i>
		E	<i>Ethics</i>
Ar. Soc.	<i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>	HIN	<i>History of Ideas News Letter</i>

HS	Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand	P PPR	Philosophy Philosophy and Phenomenological Research
JHI	Journal of the History of Ideas	PQ	Philosophical Quarterly
JMH	Journal of Modern History	PR	Philosophical Review
JP	Journal of Philosophy	PS	Philosophy of Science
M	Mind	RM	Review of Metaphysics

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